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ILLUSTRATED

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featuring

MARADA THE SHE-WOLF

by Chris Claremont & John Bolton

epic

ILLUSTRATED

FEBRUARY 1982 VOL. 1, NO. 10

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We sing.
And we sing loud.
The song fills our hearts,
even after millenia
of hard singing and sounding
in the Zones of the Sea.

We came to this Earth
during the Great Migration,
when the folk of the Whale Planet
colonized the galaxy.
But here the gravity enslaved us,
dragging us down from the sky,
to vibrate sounds
in the Zones of the Sea.

On and on it goes.
It is life.
It is dream.
It is exquisite mirage.
But not until a man from Earth
journeys to the Whale Planet
and meets Abraxas,
will we be delivered
from the Zones of the Sea.

—a song of the humpback whale



ABRAXAS AND THE EARTHMAN

written and illustrated
by
RICK VEITCH

PRESS GANG

THE SAD FACT IS THAT FOR CENTURIES MAN AND WHALE HAVE ONLY MET AT EITHER END OF A HARPOON, BUT TODAY, EVEN AS THE SLAUGHTER CONTINUES, **SOME** MEN HAVE DROPPED THEIR SHAFTS AND BEGUN TO **LISTEN...**

COMPUTERS VERIFY THESE AS THE SAME POLYRHYTHMIC PATTERNS WE RECORDED ON THE '78 EXPEDITION!

COMMANDER FALCO--YOU MUST HEAR THIS--IT'S FANTASTIC!

ISAAC, I'VE GOT **BETTER** THINGS TO DO THAN LISTEN TO A BUNCH OF FISH WITH INDIGESTION!

GROOOOONNNN KREET KREET KLIK KLIK

FOUR FATHOMS UNDER THE SARGASSO SEA, WITHIN THE NUCLEAR ATTACK SUBMARINE **BARB**, ONE SUCH MAN IS LISTENING--CETOLOGIST **JOHN ISAAC**, WHO HAS DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE HAUNTING CRIES THAT ECHO BENEATH THE WAVES...

NO, SIR, THIS **ISN'T** THEIR MATING SEASON!

I USED TO KNOW A LITTLE LADY IN SINGAPORE WHO WOULD MAKE NOISES LIKE THAT!

SIR, THOSE WHALES ARE A LOT MORE THAN DUMB ANIMALS. OUR COMPUTERS HAVE IDENTIFIED COMPLEX LEVELS OF LANGUAGE STRUCTURE IN THEIR SONGS.

THEY SOUND ALMOST--**UNEARTHLY!**

AND I DOUBT IF THE NAVY TAKES THIS AS LIGHTLY AS YOU DO, SIR, OR THEY SURELY WOULDN'T HAVE PROVIDED ME WITH THE SERVICES OF YOUR SUB FOR MY RESEARCH!

BAROOOMMMM KLANG



DON'T KID YOURSELF, SON. THEY HAVE TO DO **SOMETHING** WITH US WHILE WE'RE WAITING AROUND HERE FOR THE NEXT WAR!

KLANG



WAIT A SECOND... THAT'S NO WHALE!



WITHOUT A WARNING, THE **BARB** LURCHES TO ONE SIDE--

JESUS H. CHRIST.

SOUND GENERAL QUARTERS!

IT'S GOT TO BE A **LIFE FORM**, SIR, OR SHE'D HAVE REGISTERED ON OUR SCOPES!



ONE OF YOUR DAMN **WHALES** I'LL WAGER, ISAAC.

GET ONE OF THE **REMOTE CAMERAS** ON IT AND LET'S HAVE A LOOK!

THE VIDEO SCREENS FLICKER TO LIFE AND REVEAL NOT A WHALE, BUT A SQUIRMING VISION FROM THE BOWELS OF HELL ITSELF!

MY GOD.

W-WHAT IS IT?



ALL AHEAD FULL!
GIVE HER
EVERYTHING
SHE'S GOT!

YESSIR!

DAMAGE
CONTROL--
REPORT!

EXTENSIVE LEAKAGE
IN ALL COMPARTMENTS--
REPORTS OF LARGE
SPINES BREACHING THE
HULL, WE'RE TAKING ON
A LOT OF WATER, SIR!

IF THAT WATER
REACHES THE
REACTOR
CORE--

BUT THERE IS NO
TIME TO THINK
THE UNTHINKABLE...

SEAWATER FINDS THE
MAIN CIRCUITS AND THE
POWER FAILS TO THE
SOUND OF THE BULK-
HEAD BUCKLING UNDER
TERRIBLE STRESS...

KREEEK
SNAP!

RACKED BY
EXPLOSIONS
FROM WITHIN
AND BEING TORN
STEM TO STERN
FROM WITHOUT,
THE **BARB'S**
SUPER STRUCTURE
FINALLY CRACKS
AND SHE GIVES
UP HER CREW
TO THE COLD
JAWS OF DOOM...

ENGULFED
AND GUTTED,
SHE MAKES HER
FINAL
DIVE...

NO CHANCE
TO REACH
THE SURFACE--
THIS IS
IT!

...AND I'LL
NEVER KNOW
WHO WAS
RESPONSIBLE...
OR **WHY!**

JOHN ISAAC IS WRONG!

S-SOMETHING FROM
INSIDE THAT THING
IS **PULLING**
ME IN!

GOT TO
GET A HOLD
OF FALCO--
MAYBE SAVE
HIM, TOO!

AIR!
I CAN
BREATH IN
THIS STUFF!

I'VE HEARD
OF EXPERIMENTS
USING **MEMBRANE**
AS EFFECTIVE MOISTURE
BARRIERS, BUT NEVER
AT **THESE** PRESSURES!

**CAPTAIN
ROTWANG!**
I'VE GAFFED
A PAIR OF THE
DOUBLE-
BRAINERS!



GOOD WORK,
MR. STAUB! 'T WAS
NOT SO HARD A
TASK, THEN TO
FILL OUT OUR
CREW...

LOOK HOW
THIS ONE
GAGS AT THE
SIGHT OF MY
DISMEMBERMENT!



THE GREAT RED THAT
GOES BY THE NAME
ABRAKAS WAS WHO
DISMASTED ME,
EARTHMAN! AND
'T WAS THE **XLEXU**
SURGEONS WHO
FASHIONED ME
THIS LOVELY PEG
TO HOP ABOUT
ON!



BUT THEN, YE'LL
BE MEETING
BOTH SOON
ENOUGH!



PUT YER **BACKS**
INTO IT, ME BUCKOS!
LET US LEAVE THIS
IMPOVERISHED LITTLE
PLANET WITH ITS
TINY WHALES!

ISAAC HAS NOT
UNDERSTOOD
A WORD THAT
HAS BEEN
SPOKEN TO HIM...

...BUT THE FULL IMPACT OF
THE SITUATION IS BECOMING
INCREASINGLY CLEAR!

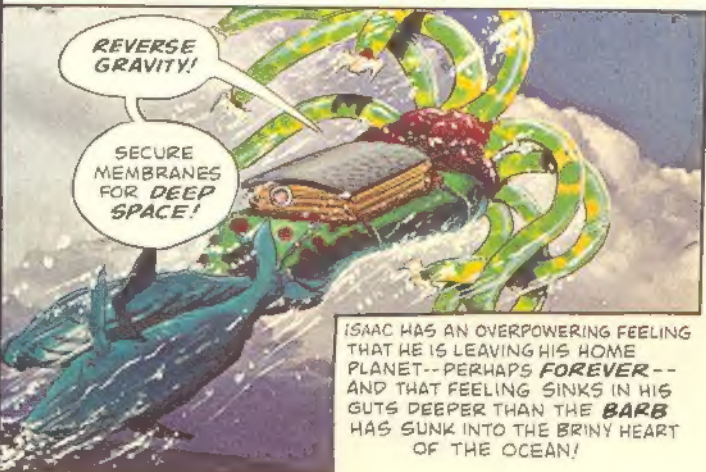
UNNNH...
WHAT'S GOING
ON?

COMMANDER,
I THINK
WE'RE BEING
SHANGHAIED!



IS SHE
BOILING YET,
MR. STAUB?

AYE,
CAPTAIN
ROTWANG!



**REVERSE
GRAVITY!**

SECURE
MEMBRANES
FOR DEEP
SPACE!

ISAAC HAS AN OVERPOWERING FEELING
THAT HE IS LEAVING HIS HOME
PLANET--PERHAPS **FOREVER**--
AND THAT FEELING SINKS IN HIS
GUTS DEEPER THAN THE **BARB**
HAS SUNK INTO THE BRINY HEART
OF THE OCEAN!

...BUT FALCO'S
PAIN IS FAR
GREATER!

YOU MEAN
THEY SUNK
MY SHIP
AND KILLED
MY WHOLE
CREW-- JUST
FOR A COUPLE
**EXTRA
HANDS?**

MY GOD,
ISAAC...
**WHAT ARE
WE DEALING
WITH?**

I DON'T
KNOW, SIR.

BUT DO YOU
SEE WHERE THEY'RE
TAKING US?

IT'S A TREE!
THEY'RE **LIVING**
IN SPACE-- IN A
GIANT TREE!

IMPOSSIBLE!
THESE CREATURES
HAVEN'T THE
TECHNOLOGY
TO ACCOMPLISH
SUCH A FEAT!

HAVEN'T THEY,
SIR? AREN'T WE
LOOKING AT IT?

AS SOON AS WE DOCK,
TURN ALL BRANCHES
INTO THE SUN, MR. STAUB.
I'LL WASTE NO MORE
TIME GETTING TO THE
HUNTING GROUNDS!

**AYE,
SIR!**





I WANT A
FLENSING CREW
ON THOSE WHALES,
AND NO DELAY! THEY
MAY BE PYGMIES COM-
PARED TO OUR **USUAL FARE**
BUT THEY'LL GIVE US ENOW
MEAT AND OIL TO SEE
US THROUGH TO THE
**WHALE
PLANET!**

TELL THE
**KLEXU
SURGEONS**
TO MEET
ME ON THE
QUARTER-
DECK!

AYE,
SIR!

HERE'S TWO MORE
VICTIMS FOR YE,
KLEXU. THE YOUNG
ONE SHOULD MAKE
A GOOD **LOOKOUT!**
PREPARE THE OTHER
FOR **FURNACE
DUTY!**

CHIT.

CHIT.

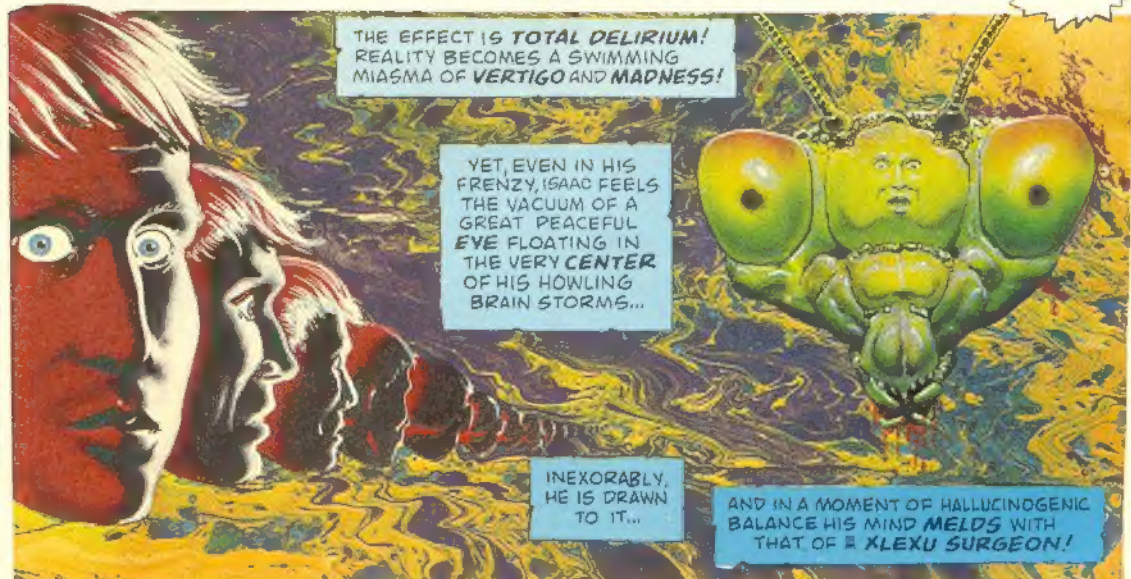
I DON'T
THINK I
LIKE THIS.

GREAT CLAWS SWEEP
THE MEN OFF THE
DECK AND UGLY
FANGS PUSH VENOM
INTO THEIR VEINS--



ARRRG!

OWW!



THE EFFECT IS **TOTAL DELIRIUM!**
REALITY BECOMES A SWIMMING
MIASMA OF **VERTIGO AND MADNESS!**

YET, EVEN IN HIS
FRENZY, ISAAC FEELS
THE VACUUM OF A
GREAT PEACEFUL
EYE FLOATING IN
THE VERY **CENTER**
OF HIS HOWLING
BRAIN STORMS...

INEXORABLY,
HE IS DRAWN
TO IT...

AND IN A MOMENT OF HALLUCINOGENIC
BALANCE HIS MIND **MELDS** WITH
THAT OF A **KLEXU SURGEON!**

ISAAC AWAKENS TO THE
DISORIENTING SENSATION
OF INHABITING **TWO BODIES**
AT ONCE--

--HIS OWN PARALYZED
FLESH AND THAT OF
THE XLEXU!

HIS ESSENCE DRIFTS
BETWEEN OSCILLATING
WAVES OF HUMAN
REASONING AND
INSECTILE THOUGHT
PROCESSES...

IT IS HIS **OWN CRUSTACEOUS CLAWS**
THAT REACH DOWN AND MAKE THE
FIRST **INCISIONS...**

WHILE FROM HIS ANESTHETIZED BODY
HE WATCHES IN HELPLESS FASCINATION
AS HIS HUMANITY IS **PEELED AWAY!**

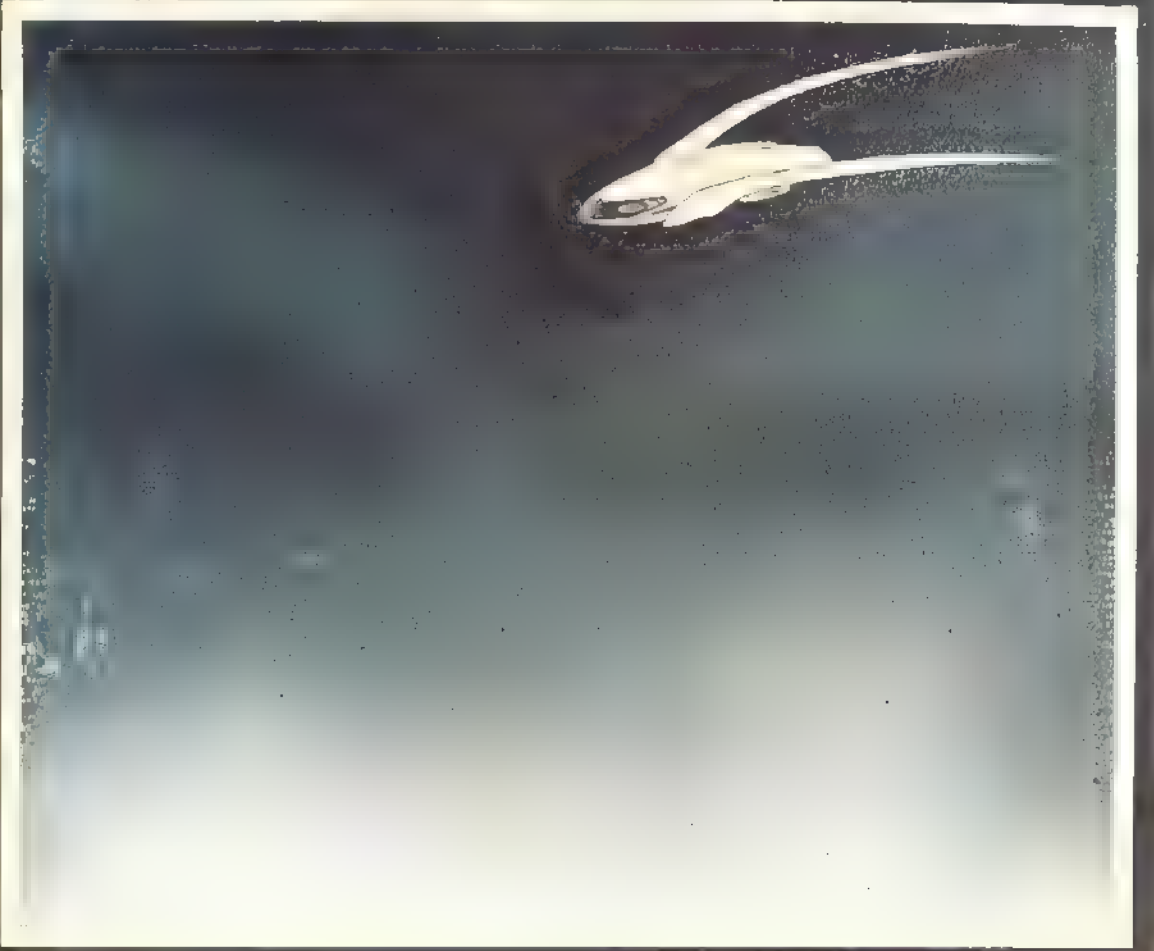
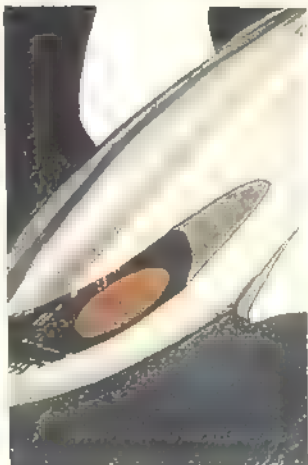
AND
SOMEWHERE
BACK ON
EARTH
THE WHALES
ARE SINGING!

...not until a man from Earth
journeys to the Whale Planet
and meets Abraxas,
will we be delivered
from the Zones of the Sea.

1981
Veitch

ABRAXAS AND THE EARTHMAN continues next issue





PROLOGUE

They never did find all of her after the bomb went off. But they found enough...

McFadden restructured her exactly from a fragment of her left breast. Well, not quite exactly. He made a certain unbudgeted alteration in the interests of establishing diplomatic relations. Politically and genetically speaking it was a tradeoff. She wanted to end the war, he gave her a final chance.

All she had to do was die.
Again...

LIAISON

War with the Krem had over the years become big business. Megabuck military/industrial conglomerates rose and fell depending on the fortunes of war.

It was without doubt the most profitable war ever fought. And the most absurd. Neither side could afford to win. Which meant neither side could afford for the other to lose, corporate logic being what it was.

Peace was downright bad for business because the only viable alternative, free trade, was impossible with the Krem.

There was something about them. A gland of enzyme or a chemical in the sweat or something they ate but they were intolerable. Deathly so. Prolonged exposure to the Krem inevitably produced irritability followed by insanity.

followed by death.

So while there had been several attempts to reach some sort of equitable peace, most notably the Cordor Conference, they invariably ended in frustration, death, and resumption of conflict.

And once the Conglomerates, led by Icon Enterprises, began turning a profit, peace became a liability. Costs were minimal—a few billion lives per annum—and profits from a galaxy-wide wartime economy were simply staggering.

At the end of each fiscal year corporate heads would wag, vowing to do something about "The Krem Menace," but they never did anything.

Business was business and, like the war, business was booming.

So was Taggart. Unfortunately about five minutes too soon. The homemade laser bomb was still in her pocket when it went off.

Her father had headed the Cordor delegation. Had died on some forgotten mudball halfway across the universe. They hadn't even gone back to get his body. And they certainly hadn't listened to him.

But they would listen to her, these captains of industry, sitting in plush climate-controlled offices, hidden from the war and the death by columns of figures on reams of computer print-outs that gauged the war coldly in terms of dollars spent and dollars earned.

She would bring a little piece of the war to their doorstep and force them to hear her out.



In that, at least, she was successful. She rattled windows for blocks around. If not, maintenance crews the better part of a week to scrape her from Icon's lobby and the public uproar that followed was even louder than the bomb blast.

A Senate subcommittee launched an investigation and President Atwill unveiled yet another proposed peace plan. But Congress no longer ran the world. Neither did the President, for all his stirring speeches. The Conglomerates did. And Icon ruled the Conglomerates.

By the following spring the subcommittee had faded quietly into oblivion in a mysterious plane crash, and shortly afterward Atwill had a sudden change of heart. It came with a ranch estate and fifty acres of choice California farmland, compliments of Icon.

Peace negotiations never got off the ground, proving Icon correct again. Everyone had a price.

Even Taggart. Hers was \$14.9 billion and Icon took that bill, too. They had her remade from scratch. Or, in his precise terms, from small slivers of epidermis from her left breast.

As far as Icon was concerned, she was a new person. A new group. A new conglomerate.



Icon was determined to nip them in the bud. And Taggart's was just the bud they needed. So Icon rebuilt her, cell by cell, until she was exactly as she had been.

Except for a small synthetic gland no bigger than a thimble nestled behind her liver. That was McFadden's idea.

And if... if... it worked as he hoped, the Mongers, the world, and even the Krem just might have the means to bring peace to a war-torn galaxy.

If it didn't, Taggart would die.

For the third time...

He was responsible for her second death. That was the only part of the plan he didn't like. Since her rebirth she had come to be the daughter he'd never known.





Medicated to watch her with the animals, she had a way with them. And since her second life was of necessity an isolated one in the sterile confines of Icon's lab they became her only real friends. Periodically while she slept McFadden entered the lab and removed the most affected ones. Without exception they grew irritable, refused to eat and finally died.

The gland was working but it wasn't time for her to know that. Not yet. Everything depended on her ignorance. Her's, and most importantly, Icon's.



Sergeant Lucas agreed wholeheartedly. He was McFadden's direct link with the Mongers and other than McFadden was the only one who knew about the gland. And it was Sergeant Lucas who made the final arrangements with the Krem. Everything was, he told McFadden with a smile, going according to schedule...



Taggart's trial took three weeks and McFadden damned her. He told the Tribunal of the long conversations they'd shared, via monitors, about the Mongers. Icon trusted him completely. Taggart hated him.

No longer needed she was found guilty of sedition and murder — her own — and sentenced to die. A stiff sentence considering the death penalty was a thing of the past, but by the end of the proceedings the judicial board had grown quite irritable and

She was, McFadden thought ruefully, the ultimate hostile witness...





She shivered, remembering the nightmare. The vile green gas that reached for her like strands of a spider's web. And falling... as if down an endless well. But no matter how far or fast she fell the spider kept crawling closer and closer.

McFadden helped her up.

He was in the uneasy, milling crowd of newsmen, photographers and Icon officials gathered a month later to watch her execution.

Nearly time, he thought, as she was lead handcuffed to a small airtight chamber unused for the last three hundred years.

He caught her eye, smiled and winked.

Then she was ushered past him into the drab green room and strapped to a hard-backed wooden chair. Nobody said a prayer for her reconstituted soul, or if they did she never heard.

The only thing she heard was the gentle plink of the cyanide capsule when it finally struck the acid.

She woke neither in Heaven or Hell but rather in the gleaming sickbay of a small Icon shuttle. McFadden was still smiling.

It was the first time since The Change he had ever touched her. He winced at the contact and nearly gagged. She was beautiful... and deadly. Just like the spider. Or the Krem.

Keeping a respectful distance, McFadden told her everything. About the gland that would, he had every reason to believe, enable her to deal with the Krem... her second faked death... and how she had been smuggled off-world away from Icon and toward a second rendezvous at Cordor.

She was their liaison with the Krem. Would succeed where her father had failed. If the gland worked.



And if Sergeant Lucas hadn't been standing there in the doorway, Icon plasma-blaster in hand.

Judas. Except Icon paid him considerably more than thirty pieces of silver, Icon had used them all. McFadden, Taggart, The Mongers, even the Krem. Like her father Taggart would die on Coridor and the peace efforts would die right along with her. Icon would continue waging war and raking in huge profits. And they would write Taggart off as a business loss.

It was a conscious effort that nearly killed her but she felt it pulse way down deep inside. The gland.

Sergeant Lucas was suddenly, violently ill. He staggered back, clutched his stomach and puked until he felt like his stomach was coming up his throat and out his mouth. His body twisted in pain and he fell to the floor. There was a sharp roaring in his ears that he only vaguely recognized as his own screams.

He saw Taggart dimly through a red haze, raised his blaster... cursed... and blew most of his head away. Anything to stop the agony.

Taggart lost consciousness then and when she finally awoke, head pounding from the worst hangover imaginable, Sergeant Lucas had grown cold and stiff. And McFadden had slashed his own throat with a scalpel...

A week later she reached Cordor, found the conference site, buried McFadden



and what little remained of her father.

She left Sergeant Lucas to the swirling green sand and the scavengers. Just like Icon had left her father...



She was waiting by his grave when the Krem shuttle landed several hundred yards away across the barren wasteland.

Taggart met the delegation halfway.



"Mr. Ambassador," she said as she stepped forward to shake his hand, "I've been dying to meet you."

Watchstop

Faces The Future

DR. WATCHSTOP,
I PRESUME.

YES,
THAT'S
ME.

WELCOME!
AH... YOU MUST BE
THE LAD FROM THE
UNIVERSITY, COME
TO SEE ME! BUT OF
COURSE, COME IN,
COME IN! I'M ON
THE VERGE OF A
VERY EXCITING
BREAKTHROUGH,
YOU SEE.





HERE, IN
MY LAB, I'M
CHALLENGING
OUR PLACE IN
TIME OR THE
TIME OF THE
REST OF THE
COSMOS TO
OURS, DON'T
YOU SEE?



MANY HAVE
PURSUED AN
UNDERSTANDING
OF THIS DIMENSION
OF TIME TO THE
PURPOSE OF
TRANSPORTING
THEMSELVES TO
OTHER DAYS AS
EASILY AS
ONE WALKS TO
OTHER PLACES.

YES,
DOCTOR,
I KNOW...

TIME TRAVEL
THEY CALLED
IT! PRETTY
FAR-FETCHED
STUFF IF YOU
ASK ME!

167/1024 27-046 SEC.

ANYWAY, LACKING AN ABSOLUTE FRAME OF REFERENCE, ONE MIGHT WELL HAVE WONDERED HOW ONE COULD KNOW IF HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN MOVING THROUGH TIME AT ANY PARTICULAR TIME, CONFUSING...YES?

YES, DOCTOR, I...

DON'T INTERRUPT ME WHILE I'M ELUCIDATING!

YOU SEE, EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT IF ONE WENT "BACKWARDS" IN TIME, THERE WOULD BE A BIG PUFF OF SMOKE AND THEN YOU WOULD SEE KNIGHTS IN ARMOR OR THREE CENT POSTAGE STAMPS OR SOME SUCH! EVERYONE WHO HAS WANTED TO RELIVE THE PAST OR SEE THE FUTURE HAS TRIED TO TRANSPORT HIMSELF, A MAN OR AN OBJECT THROUGH TIME, AND THE WORLD LOOKED THE SAME AFTER THE EXPERIMENT! THERE WAS THEIR MISTAKE!

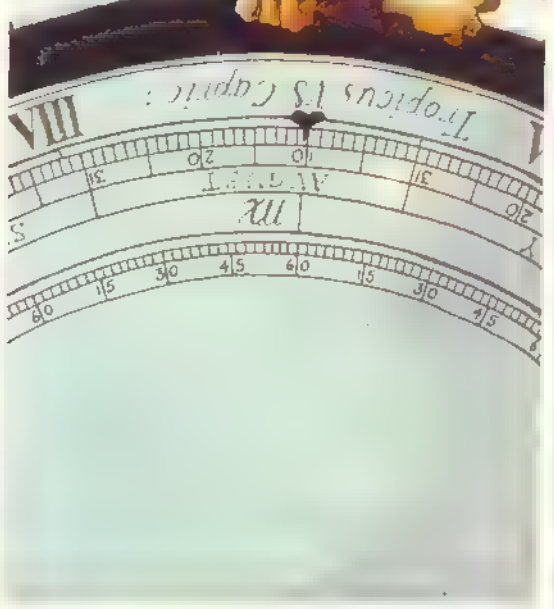


YOU SEE, I'M
NOT SEEKING TO
CHANGE MY
POSITION IN TIME...
I'M TRYING TO
CHANGE THE REST
OF THE WORLD!

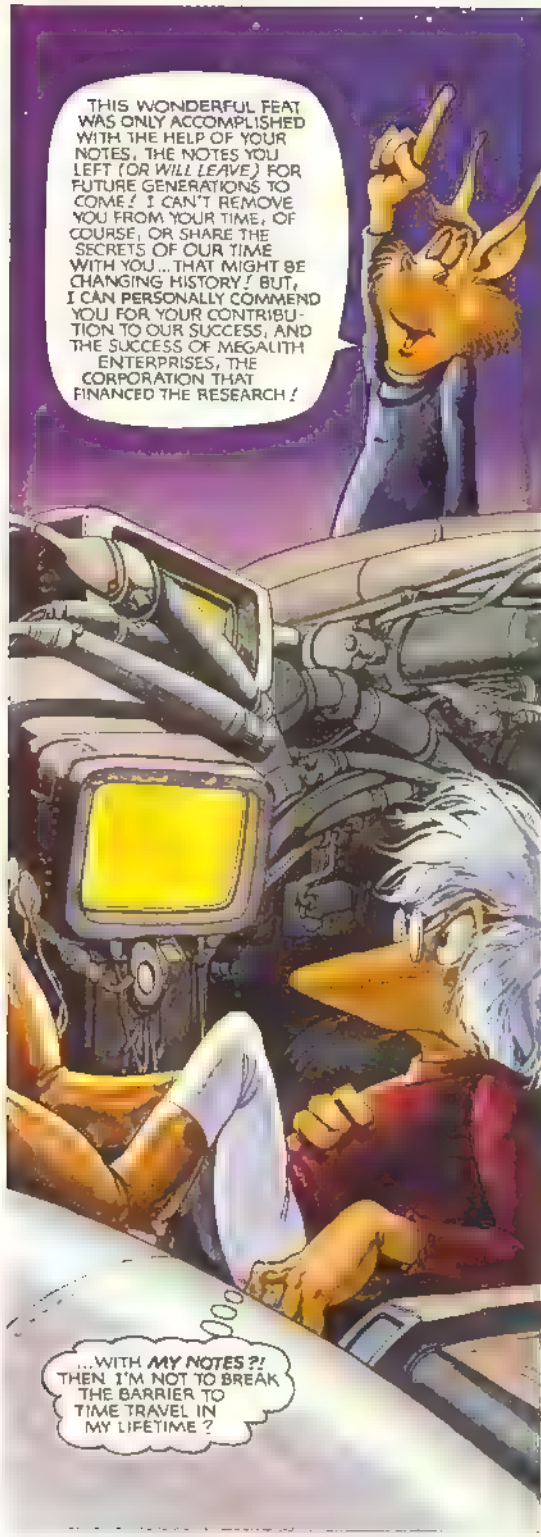


YES, YES, I KNOW, PROFESSOR! YOU
SEE, I'M NOT FROM THE UNIVERSITY--NOT
THE ONE YOU KNOW! I'M FROM THE
FUTURE, WHERE FOUR HUNDRED YEARS
FROM NOW (YOUR TIME), OUR RESEARCH
TEAM HAS TRANSVERTED TIME AT LAST!
I'VE COME HERE TO THE PAST TO THANK
YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

WHAT?!



The instrument features several concentric circular scales. The outermost scale is marked with Roman numerals: VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII. The next scale inward is labeled 'Tropicus is Capric' and has markings for 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60. Below this is a scale labeled 'Aequino' with markings for 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60. The bottom scale has markings for 15, 30, 45, 60, 75, 90. The instrument is mounted on a dark, possibly wooden, base.



THIS WONDERFUL FEAT WAS ONLY ACCOMPLISHED WITH THE HELP OF YOUR NOTES, THE NOTES YOU LEFT (OR WILL LEAVE) FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO COME! I CAN'T REMOVE YOU FROM YOUR TIME, OF COURSE, OR SHARE THE SECRETS OF OUR TIME WITH YOU... THAT MIGHT BE CHANGING HISTORY! BUT, I CAN PERSONALLY COMMEND YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO OUR SUCCESS, AND THE SUCCESS OF MEGALITH ENTERPRISES, THE CORPORATION THAT FINANCED THE RESEARCH!

...WITH MY NOTES?! THEN I'M NOT TO BREAK THE BARRIER TO TIME TRAVEL IN MY LIFETIME?



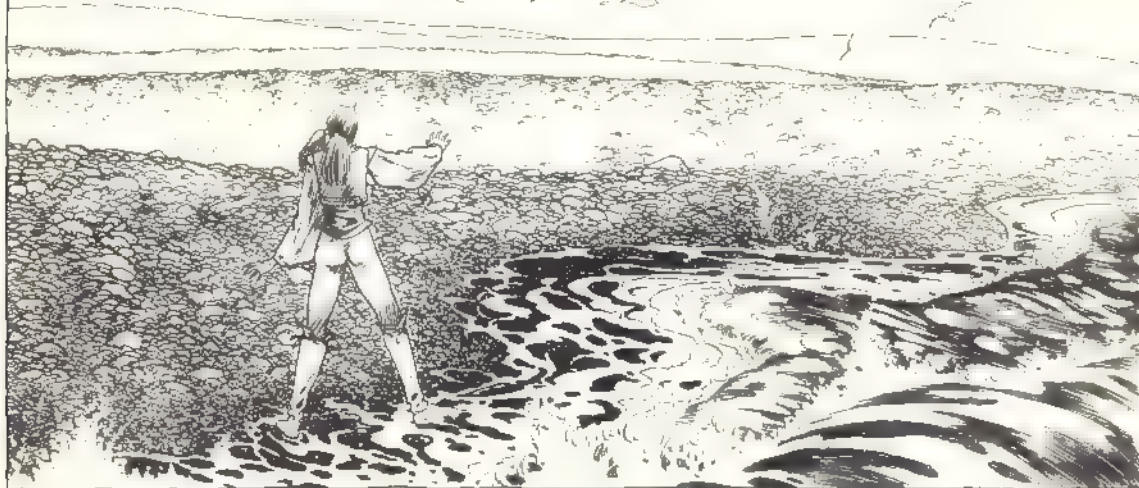
I THINK, PERHAPS, I SHALL STOP KEEPING NOTES.

SYNOPSIS:

Seven years ago, the People of the Stars were wiped out by Nizenthor, mightiest of the evil Demon Lords. Since then, the only two survivors of the slaughter, Bronwen and her twin brother Bran, have lived in Nurnheim Forest, under the protection of the benevolent witch, Dame Melinor.

When the twins attempted to contact the Old Ones, ancient beings of tremendous power and goodness, they were instead attacked by Lord Nizenthor and his minions, and Bran was gravely wounded. Now, Bronwen has been transported to the shore beside the Sea of Souls, to find and destroy the pebble that is Lord Nizenthor's soul.

Children of the Stars



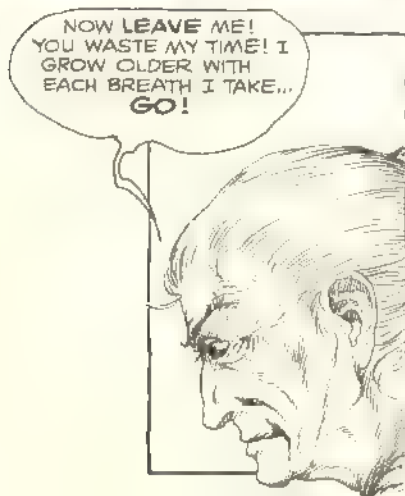
©81 CVSS

ONE TINY PEBBLE
AMONG SO MANY...

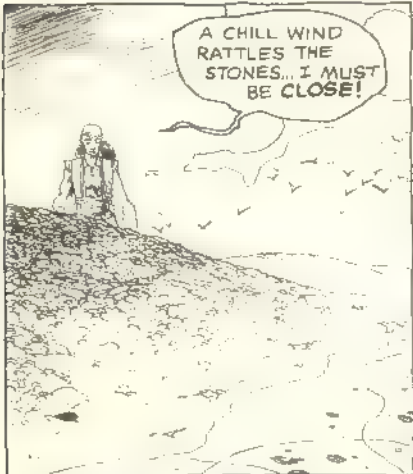


HOW AM I TO FIND
THIS SOUL-STONE ?





HOURS OF ENDLESS
BEACH LATER...



A CHILL WIND
RATTLES THE
STONES... I MUST
BE CLOSE!



IT IS AS SHE SAID,
THE VERY AIR REEKS
WITH ITS EVIL!



AT LAST!



HEAR ME, OLD ONES!
IN MY HANDS I HOLD LORD
NIZENTHOR'S LIFE. MY TASK
FOR YOU IS DONE. YET
GRANT ME A BOON...



I WOULD
SEE HIS FACE
WHEN I
DESTROY
HIM!



THAT IS
NOT TOO MUCH
TO ASK!

ONCE AGAIN AS BRONWEN'S
FEET TOUCH THE SURF, THE
BEACH BEGINS TO SHIFT
BEFORE HER GAZE...

...AS SHE IS TRANS-
PORTED TO THE
REALM OF THE
DEMON LORDS!
A BLACK, MIS-
SHAPEN LAND
CROUCHED 'ROUND
ABOUT THE CASTLE
OF LORD NIZENTHOR



THE SILENT MINIONS OF THE
DEMON LORD GATHER
AROUND BRONWEN AND
LEAD HER TO...

A HUGE GLOOM-LADEN
CHAMBER WHERE THE LORDS
OF DEMONKIND SIT IN
COUNCIL

WELL, BROTHERS,
IT SEEMS WE HAVE
A VISITOR!

IN THE NAME
OF THE DARK
WE WELCOME YOU,
BRONWEN.

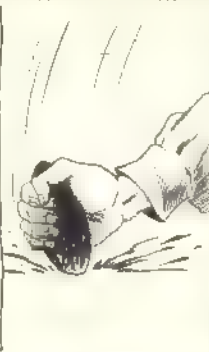
YOUR COMING HERE HAS
SAVED US MUCH TIME AND
ENERGY! IN THIS LAND ONLY YOU
AND YOUR BROTHER HAD SUFFI-
CIENT POWER TO CONTACT
THE OLD ONES!

ONLY THROUGH THEIR
INTERVENTION COULD THE
DARK HAVE BEEN STOPPED
AND THIS LAND SAVED!
NOW THAT WILL
NEVER BE!

NO!
LORD OF
DEMONS...

IT IS YOUR DOOM THAT
BRINGS ME HERE!

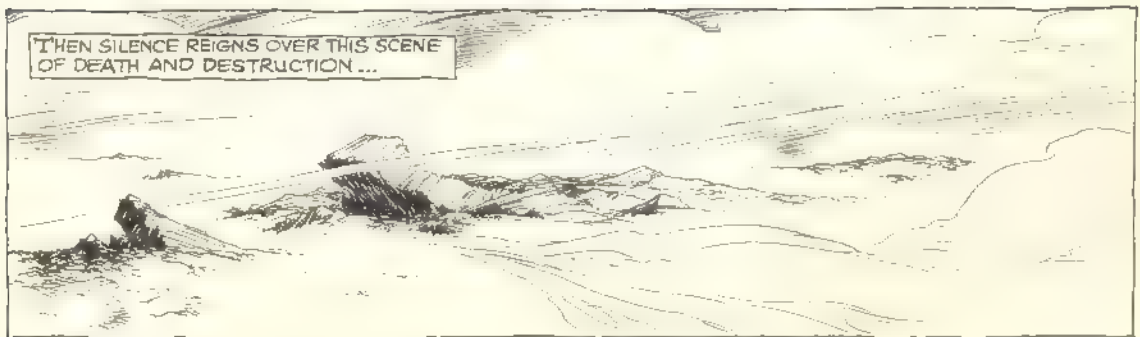
WITH ALL THE **HATE** IN HER BODY, BRONWEN **SMASHES** THE SOUL-STONE OF LORD NIZENTHOR AGAINST THE ROCK HARDNESS OF THE STAIRWAY...



THE SOUL-STONE SHATTERS AMIDST THE SHRIEKING AGONY OF THE DOOMED DEMON LORD. HIS POWER IS ENDED! ALL ABOUT HIM HIS WORKS OF EVIL TOPPLE AND FALL CRASHING BACK INTO THE DUST FROM WHENCE THEY CAME!



THEN SILENCE REIGNS OVER THIS SCENE OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION ...



...A DESTRUCTION THAT LEAVES
ONLY TWO LIVING CREATURES.

ONE WHO STRUGGLES UP
FROM THE DUST TO HEAR A
HIGH-PITCHED, WAILING CRY...

...COMING FROM THE OTHER!

LORD NIZENTHOR, RULER OF DARK EMPIRES,
WHO NOW SITS GIBBERING INSANELY AT THE
SKY.

IT IS YOU WHO KILLED
KILLED MY PARENTS!
YOU WHO HURT MY
BROTHER. YOU!

BUT NOW MY
VICTORY SEEMS
HOLLOW... THIS
REVENGE
IS BITTER INDEED!

AND YET I
MUST FINISH THIS
THING...

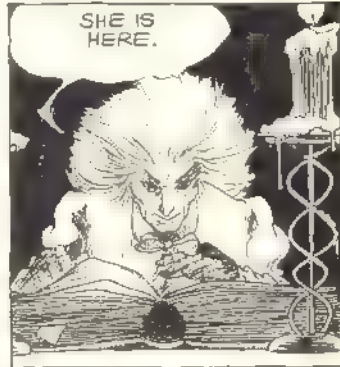
IT IS DONE!

IT IS A LONG WAY TO CAER DYVEDD! LONG ENOUGH TO HEAL THE PAIN OF RECENT DEATHS, OF OLD MEMORIES. LONG ENOUGH FOR PEACE.



MEANWHILE WITHIN THE WALLS OF CAER DYVEDD...

SHE IS HERE.



WE WELCOME YOU HOME.



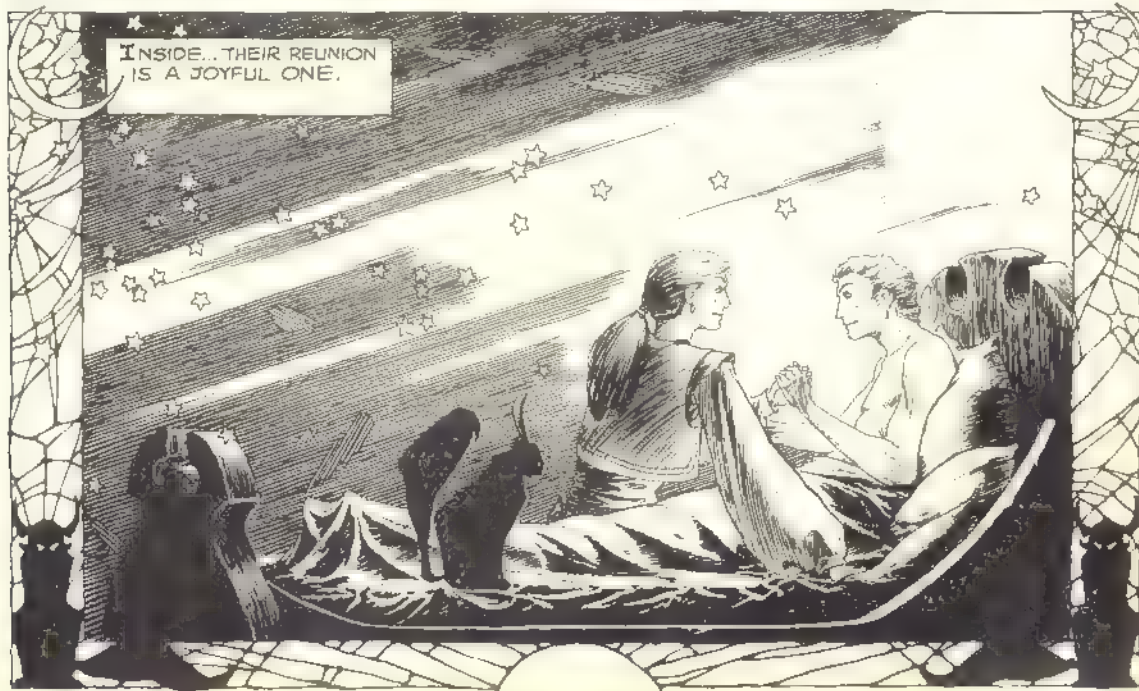
BRAN... MY BROTHER, HOW IS HE? IS HE WELL?



HE'S RECOVERED. GO TO HIM... HE IS IN THE BEDROOM.



INSIDE... THEIR REUNION IS A JOYFUL ONE.





AND FROM ON HIGH THE GODS,
THE OLD ONES, LOOK
DOWN UPON CAER DYVEDD
AND SMILE!

• END •

HE'S BACK. HE SHOULDN'T BE, BUT HE IS, THE GAME OF
A LITTLE LOVE, A LITTLE HATE* HAS HURT HIM, BUT
NOT DESTROYED HIM. HE IS STILL A SPACEWRECKED
WANDERER ON A TIMELOST WORLD, ALIEN AND UNCHARTED.

FLIGHTUS INTERUPTUS

by ARTHUR
SLYNN

PEEP

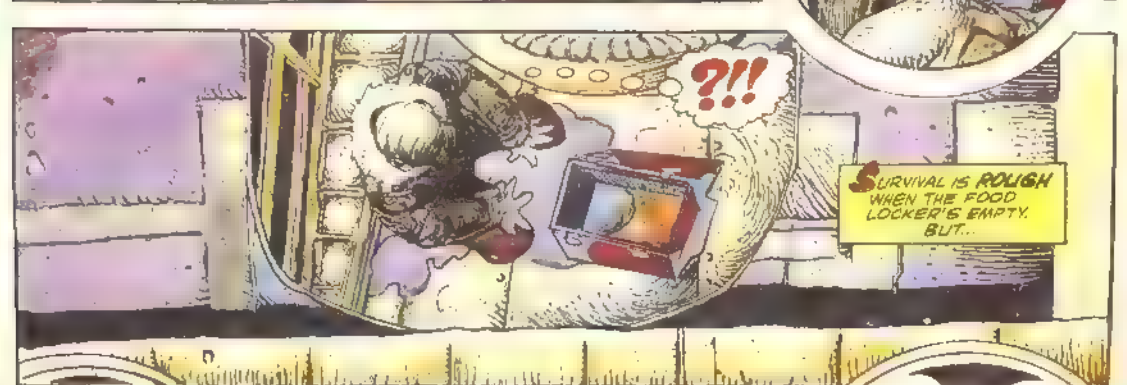
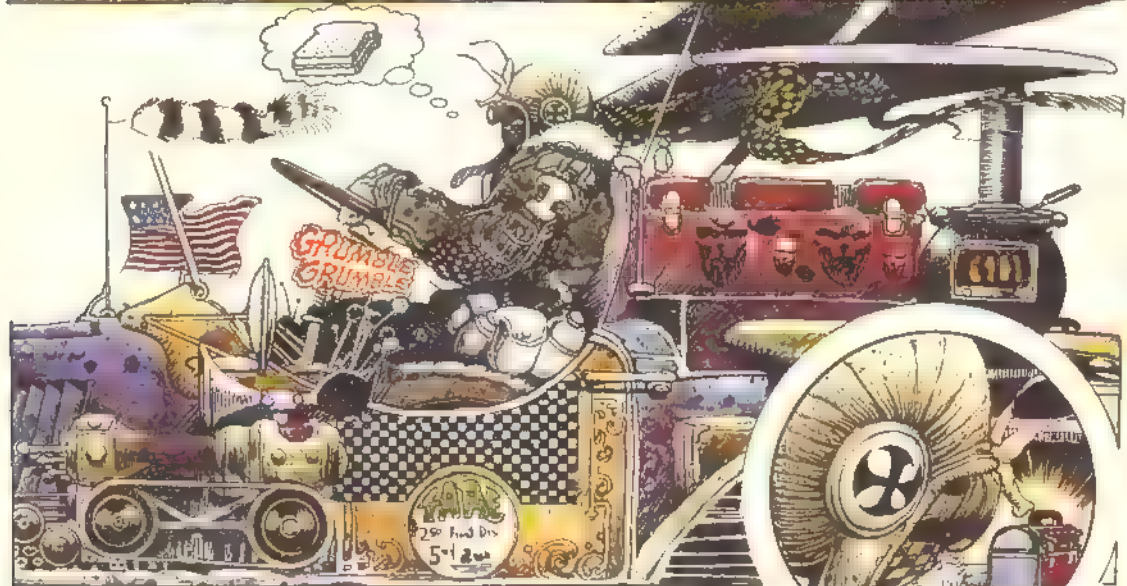
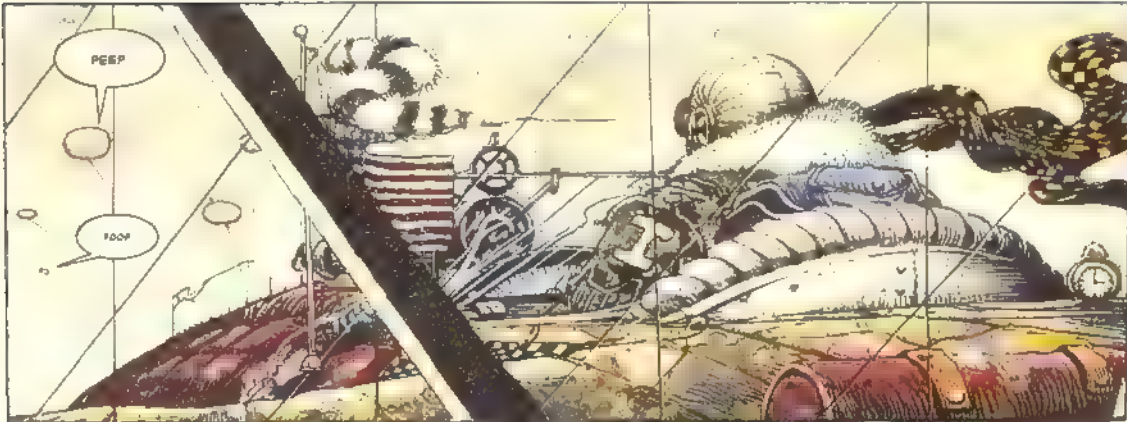
POOP

PEEP

POOP

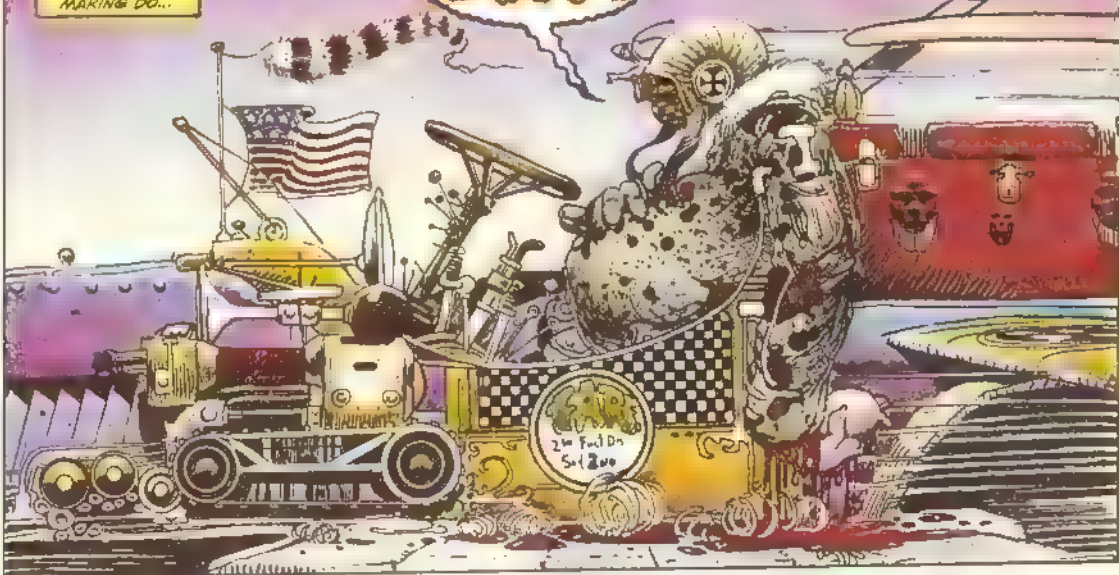
FOLLOWING A VIGOROUS PROGRAM
OF **ISOMETRIC EXERCISE**
COUPLED WITH A DIET OF **VITAMINS**,
OUR MAN HAS PULLED HIMSELF
TOGETHER AND MADE A STARTLING
RECOVERY. ONCE AGAIN HE CAN
TURN TO HIS MAIN PURSUIT...
SURVIVAL.

* SEE EPIC #8 - ED



OUR MAN FINDS
WAYS OF
MAKING DO...

URP!



PEEP!

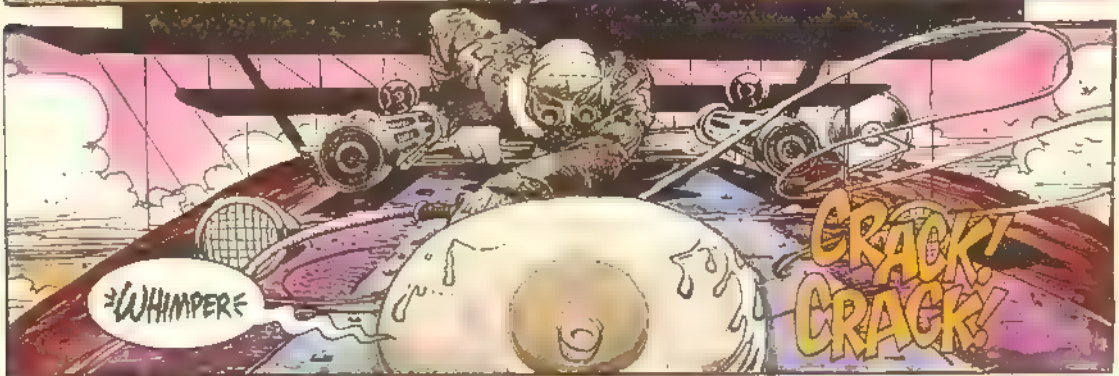
... AT THE COST OF A
LITTLE ENGINE
POWER.

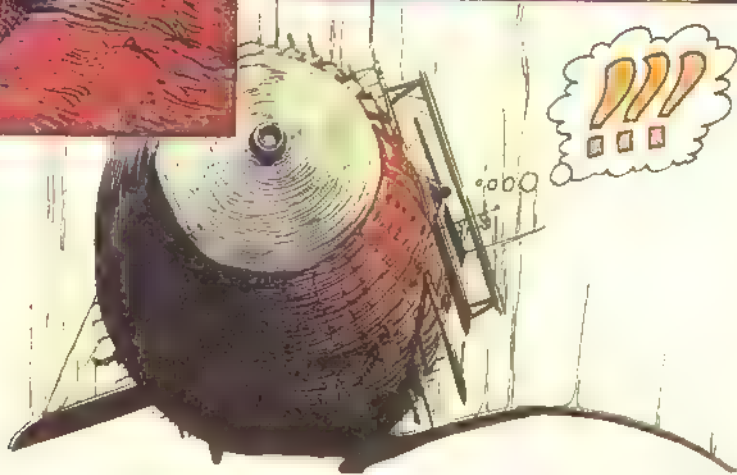
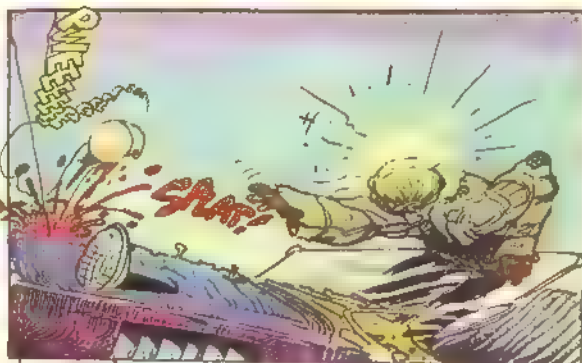
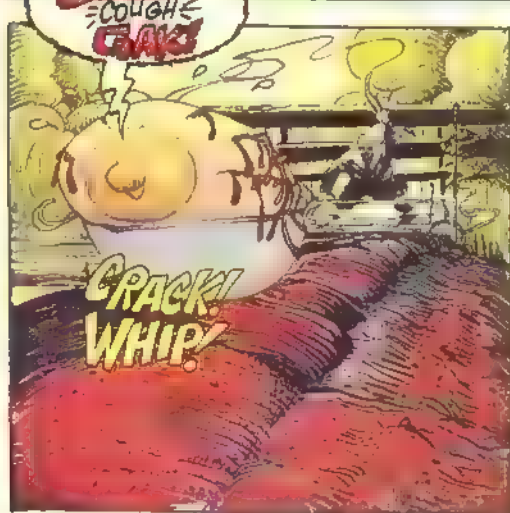
PANT
PANT



WHIMPERE

CRACK!
CRACK!







MAKING THE NECESSARY REPAIRS,
OUR MAN ONCE AGAIN RESUMES
HIS JOURNEY.



SEARCHING...

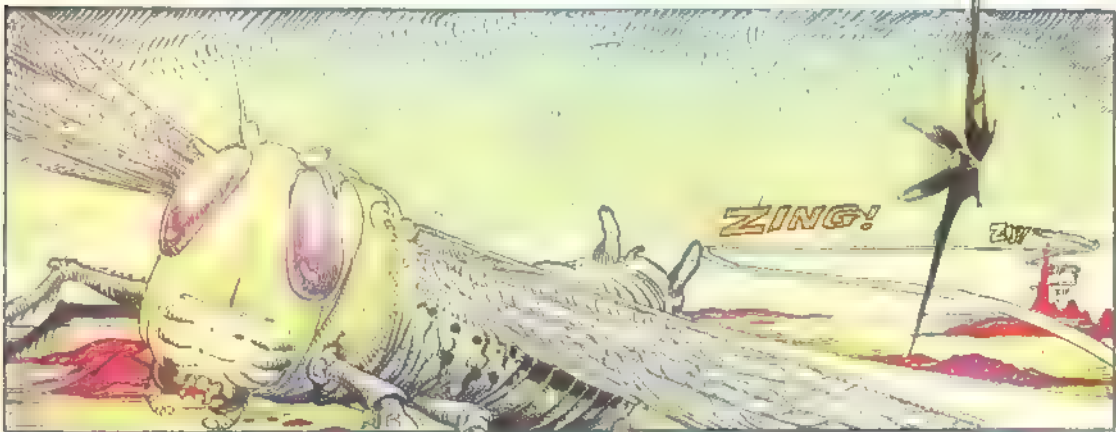
UNTIL HE
FINDS...

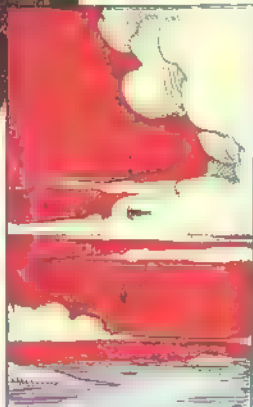
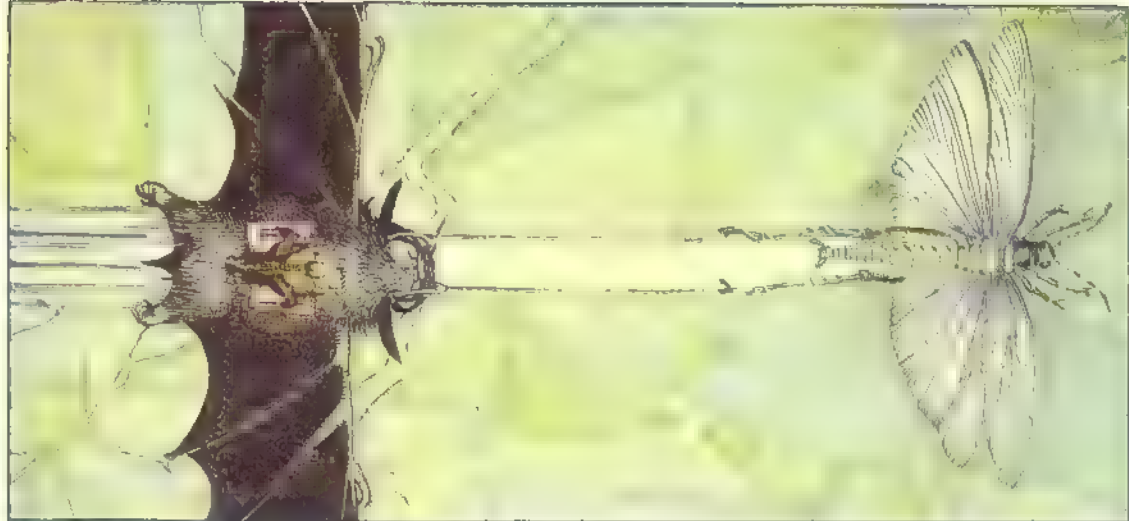


XOOO*FRICK-N-FRACK-N-PIP-PIP**TOZ.

...A SYMPATHETIC EAR.







OUR MAN RECOVERS... AS ALWAYS, SWEARING, PERHAPS, THAT HIS NEXT TRANSPORTATION...
WON'T BE SO INVOLVED IN THE FOOD CHAIN.

MARADA THE SHE-WOLF

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT, THEY RODE SOUTH AND WEST FROM DAMASCUS, TOWARDS THE COAST AND THE GALLEY WAITING TO CARRY THEIR PRISONER TO ROME. THEY'RE PARTHIAN MERCENARIES, THE FINEST CAVALRYMEN KNOWN - THEIR SKILLS HONED AND THEIR BODIES HARDENED BY A LIFETIME OF HARD-FOUGHT, HARD-WON BATTLES.

GRAUGH!



BUT EVEN THE BEST OF WARRIORS CAN BE TAKEN UNAWARES.

BY CHRIS CLAREMONT
AND JOHN BOLTON

Bayon

AN INSTANT AGO, THE PARTHIANS WERE ALONE ON THE OPEN DESERT. NOW, IN THE PRE-DAWN HALF-LIGHT, THEY FIND THEMSELVES UNDER ATTACK FROM ALL SIDES. SHAKEN BY THE SUDDENNESS OF THE AMBUSH, THEY REACT SLOWLY SLUGGISHLY.



EVEN AS THEY DESPERATELY WHEEL THEIR MOUNTS ABOUT TO MEET THE THREAT, THE RAIDERS ARE UPON THEM, LED BY A RED-BEARDED GIANT OF A MAN.

AT THEM, MY BRAVOS!



IF THEY RUN, LET 'EM GO! IF THEY FIGHT, CUT 'EM DOWN!

THE PARTHIANS -- AS RENOWNED FOR THEIR COURAGE AS THEIR ABILITY -- CHOOSE TO FIGHT.



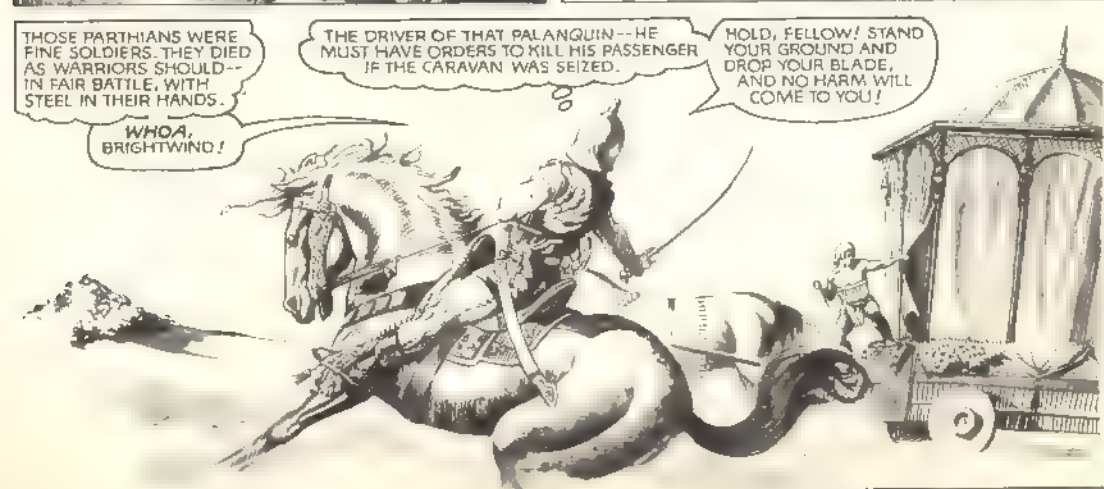
AND, TO A MAN, DIE.

THOSE PARTHIANS WERE FINE SOLDIERS. THEY DIED AS WARRIORS SHOULD -- IN FAIR BATTLE, WITH STEEL IN THEIR HANDS.

WHOA, BRIGHTWIND!

THE DRIVER OF THAT PALANQUIN -- HE MUST HAVE ORDERS TO KILL HIS PASSENGER IF THE CARAVAN WAS SEIZED.

HOLD, FELLOW! STAND YOUR GROUND AND DROP YOUR BLADE, AND NO HARM WILL COME TO YOU!



HE CRIES THE COMMAND FIRST IN LATIN, THEN IN PARTHIAN. THE DRIVER IGNORES HIM.

DAMN THE MAN! IS HE BOUND
AND DETERMINED TO ENTER
THE GATES OF DEATH'S
STRONGHOLD?!



IN THE NAME
OF MY DREAD
MASTER,
BITCH,
PREPARE
TO--



-- Gods -- H



YOU WERE
WARNED,
FOOL.

HMP! THE DRIVER
IS NO PARTHIAN.
HE'S EGYPTIAN--
AND HIS MYSTIC
AURA MARKS HIM
AS SOME KIND OF
PRIEST, AND A
SORCERER!

THIS CARAVAN WAS ORGANISED BY
TRIBUNUS GAIUS MARCELLUS FULVA.
BUT I THINK THE ROMAN WOULD BE
AS SURPRISED AS I AM TO LEARN THE
DRIVER'S TRUE IDENTITY. ANOTHER
POWER IS INVOLVED HERE: ARCANES,
MALEFIC--AND DEADLY DANGEROUS.

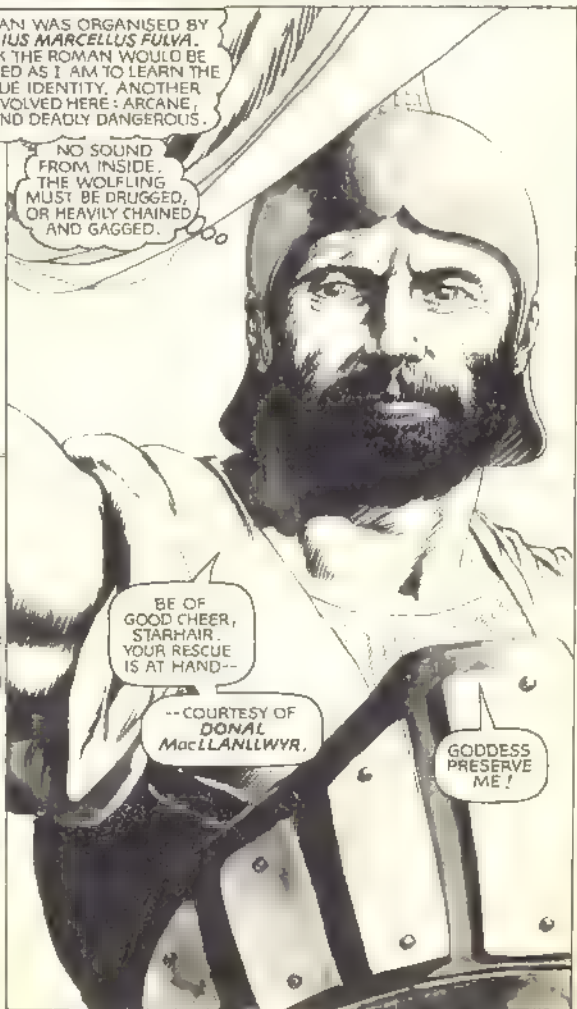
NO SOUND
FROM INSIDE.
THE WOLFING
MUST BE DRUGGED,
OR HEAVILY CHAINED
AND GAGGED.



BE OF
GOOD CHEER,
STARHAIR.
YOUR RESCUE
IS AT HAND--

--COURTESY OF
**DONAL
MACLLANLLWYR.**

GODDESS
PRESERVE
ME!

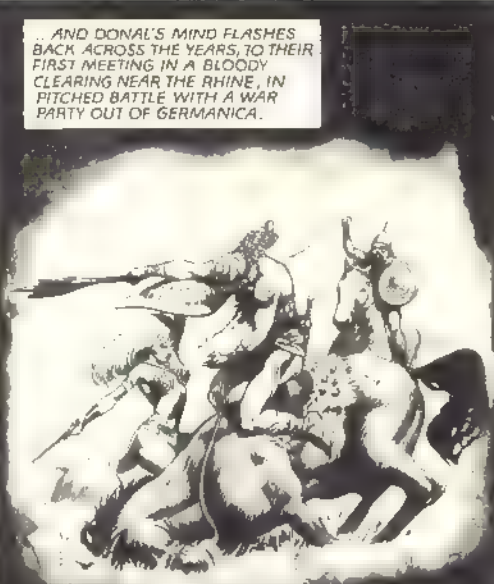


MARADA?!!

AT THE SOUND OF HIS
VOICE, THE SILVER-
HAired BEAUTY
CRINGES...



... AND DONALD'S MIND FLASHES
BACK, ACROSS THE YEARS, TO THEIR
FIRST MEETING IN A BLOODY
CLEARING NEAR THE RHINE, IN
PITCHED BATTLE WITH A WAR
PARTY OUT OF GERMANICA.



SHE WAS STILL GROWING, AS MUCH GIRL AS WOMAN,
YET SHE FOUGHT WITH A FEROCIOUS SKILL THAT
HUMBLED MOST OF THE MEN BESIDE HER AND
EARNED HER THE NAME, "SHE-WOLF."

SHE SWORE THAT NO MAN WOULD TAKE
HER AGAINST HER WILL, AND THAT IF SHE
EVER CHOSE A LOVER -- OR MATE -- IT
WOULD BE ON HER TERMS, NOT HIS. SHE
HADN'T CHANGED A WEEK AGO, WHEN
LAST I SAW HER. WHAT'S
HAPPENED TO HER SINCE ?!

IT'S TOO RISKY TO TRY TO
LEARN THE ANSWER HERE.
I'D BEST GET HER HOME,
AND QUICKLY!

UP YOU GO,
LASS!

LATER, CELEBRATING THEIR VICTORY IN A FRONTIER
POST GARRISONED BY A COHORT OF THE THUNDER-
CLAP LEGION, SHE MATCHED THOSE TOUGH
LEGIONARIES DRINK FOR DRINK, SHARING THEIR
BRAWDY SONGS AND RIBALD STORIES.



SHE GAMBLLED WITH CARELESS ABANDON, YET
INvariably WON MORE THAN SHE LOST. AND WHEN A
TROOPER STEPPED OUT OF LINE AND TRIED TO TEMPT--
THEN FORCE--HER TO HIS BED, SHE BROKE HIS JAW.



SHE DOESN'T
RESIST, SHE
WON'T SPEAK--
IT'S LIKE HANDLING
A PUPPET MADE
OF FLESH!

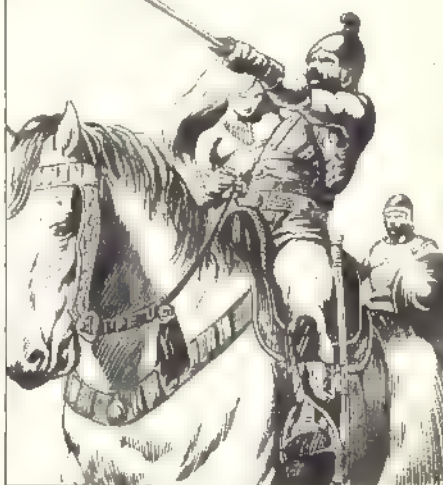
IT WAS A FAIR SCRAP,
DONAL. WE SUFFERED
MINIMAL CASUALTIES--
A FEW WOUNDED,
NONE SERIOUSLY,
NONE KILLED.

EXCELLENT, TADGH.
FORM THE MEN.
WE'LL BE AWAY
WITH THE DAWN.

DONAL FACES
EASTWARD AND,
AS THE FIRST
CREASE OF FIRE
SEARS THE CREST
OF THE HEIGHTS...

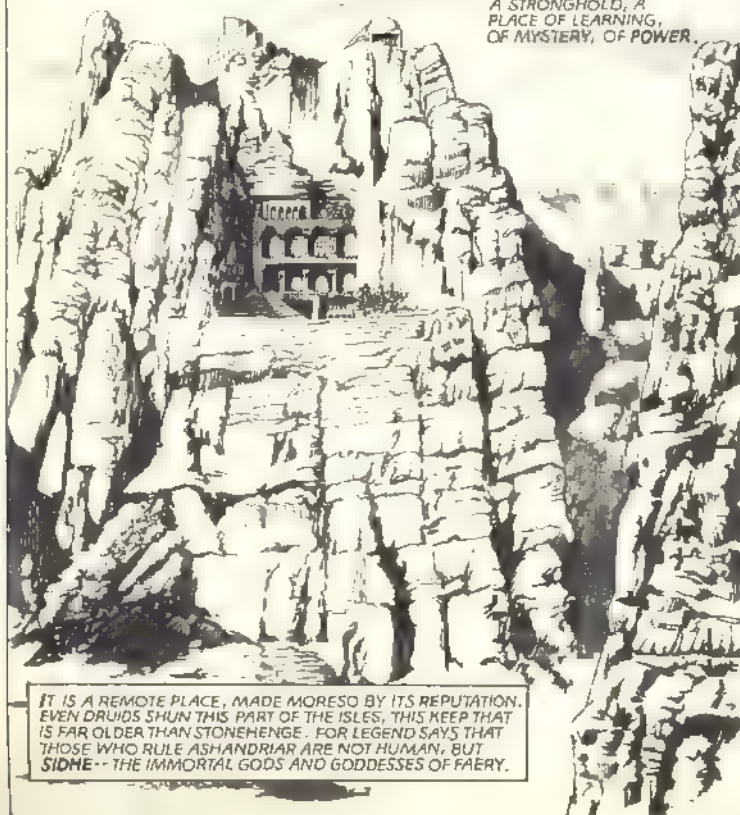


...HE DRAWS A SACRED SIGIL IN THE
AIR BEFORE HIM, AND CRIES
ANCIENT WORDS OF POWER. THE
STAR GROWS AS THE SUN RISES,
ITS GOLDEN GLOW ENVELOPING
DONAL AND HIS MEN, TRANS-
PORTING THEM FROM THE
HIGHLANDS OF GALILEE...



...TO THE GRIM, ROCKY COAST OF ENGLAND.

THIS IS ASHANDRIAR--
A STRONGHOLD, A
PLACE OF LEARNING,
OF MYSTERY, OF POWER.



IT IS A REMOTE PLACE, MADE MORE SO BY ITS REPUTATION.
EVEN DRUIDS SHUN THIS PART OF THE ISLES; THIS KEEP THAT
IS FAR OLDER THAN STONEHENGE. FOR LEGEND SAYS THAT
THOSE WHO RULE ASHANDRIAR ARE NOT HUMAN, BUT
SIDHE-- THE IMMORTAL GODS AND GODDESSES OF FAERY.

LIKE ALL
LEGENDS,
THESE HAVE
SOME TRUTH
TO THEM.



DONAL MacLLYANLLWYR
IS WARLORD OF THE KEEP,
MASTER OF THE FORCE
TEMPORAL. BUT HE DOES
NOT RULE HERE.

THAT RESPONSIBILITY IS THE PROVINCE OF HIS MOTHER, RHIANNON, MISTRESS OF THE ARTS ARCAE.

TADGH, ESCORT LADY MARADA TO HER APARTMENTS. SEE THAT SHE WANTS FOR NOTHING. I'LL JOIN YOU DIRECTLY.

WITHOUT A WORD.



... HER EYES DOWNCAST, STEPS WEAK AND SUBMISSIVE, MARADA DOES AS SHE'S TOLD.

IS THIS THE "SHE-WOLF" YOU SPOKE OF, DONAL? THE WARRIOR YOU SEARCHED HALF THE WORLD TO FIND?

I FEAR IT WAS A WASTED EFFORT.



PERHAPS, SOMETHING ILL HAPPENED TO HER IN DAMASCUS, MOTHER. I MEAN TO LEARN WHAT IT WAS.

TAKE CARE, MY SON. THERE IS A STENCH OF BLACKEST SORCERY ABOUT THE WOMAN.



GOOD MORROW, STARHAIR. I TRUST THESE QUARTERS MEET WITH YOUR APPROVAL.



AM I YOUR PRISONER, DONAL MacLLYANLLWYR?



OH! THE LADY FINDS HER TONGUE AT LAST!

NO, MARADA-- NOT PRISONER. YOU ARE MY HONORED GUEST.



YOU HAVE A MOST... UNIQUE MANNER OF EXTENDING YOUR INVITATIONS.

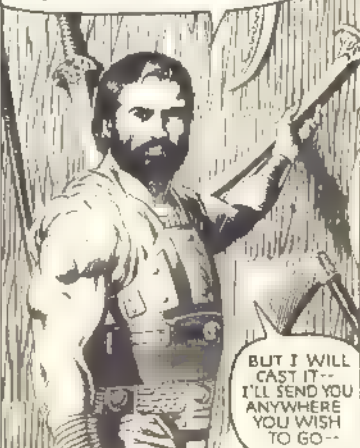
BETTER AND BETTER. FIRST, SPEECH. NOW, SOME SPIRIT. THAT'S MORE LIKE THE SHE-WOLF I REMEMBER.



MEMORIES-- LIKE YOUR SHE-WOLF-- ARE A THING OF THE PAST.

IF I AM A GUEST, MAY I THEN LEAVE?

THE ONLY WAY OUT OF ASHANDRIAR IS THE WAY WE CAME IN-- VIA MY SPELL OF TRANSPORTATION.

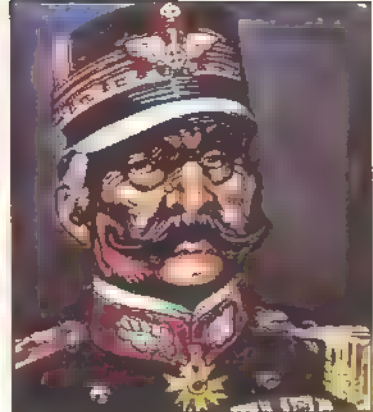


BUT I WILL CAST IT-- I'LL SEND YOU ANYWHERE YOU WISH TO GO--

PROLOGUE:



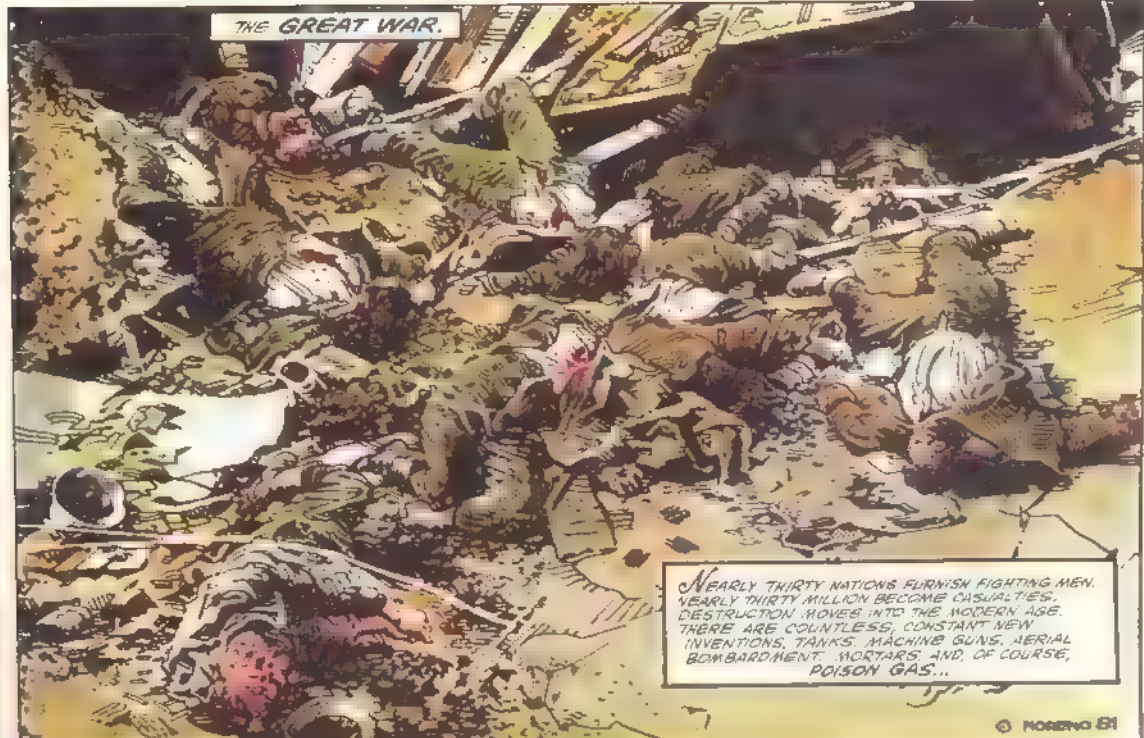
1914, THE ASSASSINATION OF
ARCHDUCHESS OF AUSTRIA, IRIS
SERB, THAT IGNITES THE
POWDER KEG OF EUROPE.



SUDDENLY, THE ARMY AND NAVY
LEADERS AND STATESMEN, SHOWN IN
NATIONAL RIDE, EAGER FOR HONOR,
GLORY AND POWER, HAVE MORE
THAN BEING WAITING FOR THE
WORLD TO GO TO WAR.

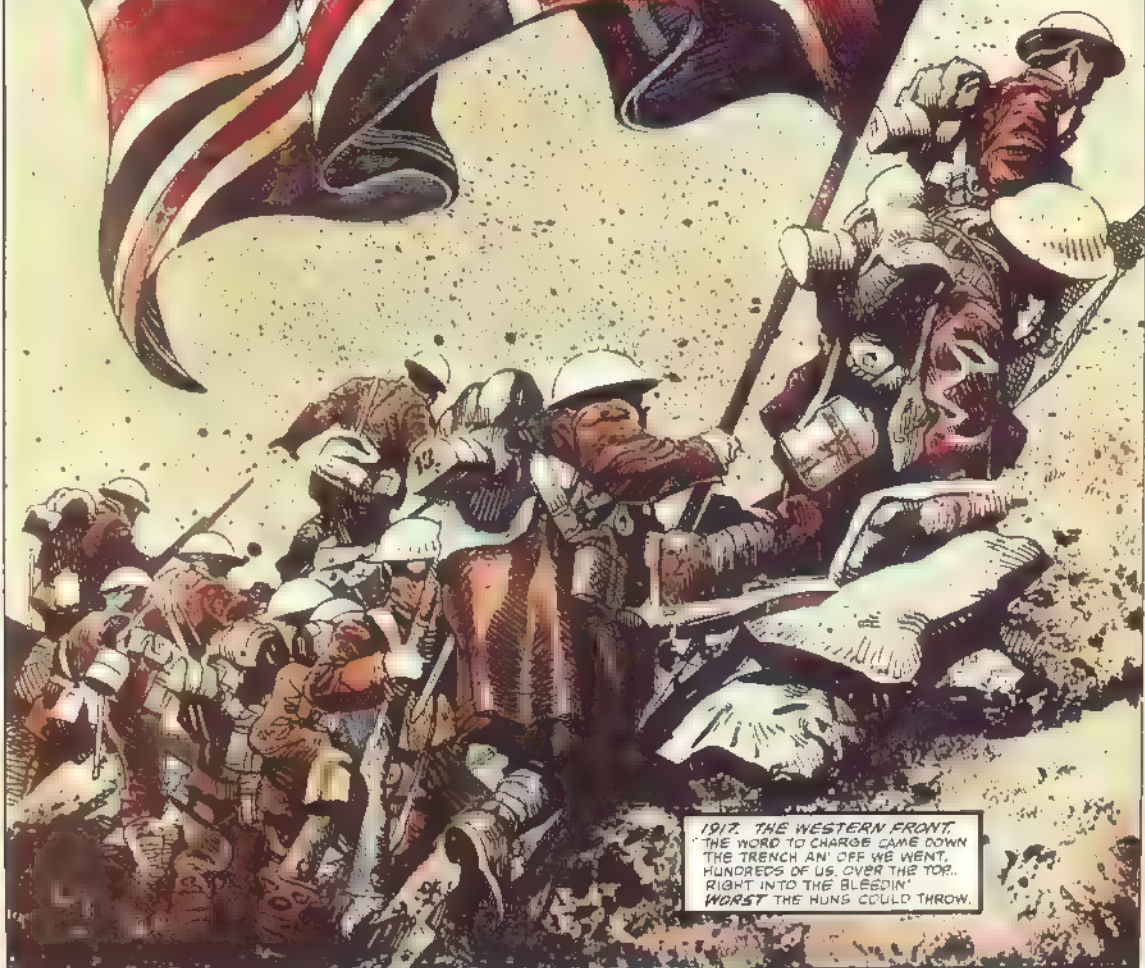


THE GREAT WAR.



NEARLY THIRTY NATIONS FURNISH FIGHTING MEN.
YEARLY THIRTY MILLION BECOME CASUALTIES.
DESTRUCTION MOVES INTO THE MODERN AGE.
THERE ARE COUNTLESS, CONSTANT NEW
INVENTIONS, TANKS, MACHINE GUNS, AERIAL
BOMBARDMENT, SUBMARINES AND, OF COURSE,
POISON GAS...

THE WEAPON



1917. THE WESTERN FRONT.
THE WORD TO CHARGE CAME DOWN
THE TRENCH AND OFF WE WENT.
HUNDREDS OF US, OVER THE TOP,
RIGHT INTO THE BLEEDING
HORROR THE HUNS COULD THROW.



"GAS" ABOUT 1917... DOWNS BY



"BUT WHATEVER THEY WERE
THROWIN', WE WERE TOO
SCARED TO STOP SO
OUT THE GERMANS
CAME...



THE BRITISHERS
ARE INTO NO MAN'S
LAND... INCREASE
FIRE! SWIFTL!

"WE HAD OUR MASKS ON, RIGHT ENOUGH,
BUT SMALL COMFORT THEY WERE IF IT WAS
BLOODY MUSTARD GAS. SEEPS RIGHT
THROUGH CLOTH AND CANVAS... BURNS
YOUR SKIN 'TIL IT COXES... GET IT IN YOUR
EYES, YOU'RE BLIND FOR LIFE! AND THERE
WERE RUMORS JERRY HAD NEWER STUFF
MORE TERRIBLE YET...



"... STORMIN' FROM THEIR TRENCHES
TO MEET US WITH BAYONETS
FIXED AN MAUSERS BLAZIN'.

BLOODY
HELL!

"IT LEFT ME WEAK-KNEED AN'
STAGGERIN'. TOO BLESSED
DAZED TO GET MY BEARINGS.

"IT WAS A MAUSER ROUND!
CUT ALONGSIDE MY HEAD...
NEARLY COST ME MY DAMNED
EAR!

C-CLOUD...!
I'M WANDERIN'
INTO THE THICK
OF THE GAS!

"BUT IT WAS TOO LATE.
THE STUFF SWIRLED
ALL AROUND ME, CUTTIN'
ME OFF FROM MY MATES.

"I COULD FEEL IT. DAMP SEEPIN'
TO MY SKIN. AT LEAST IT WASN'T
STINKIN' MUSTARD GAS BUT LORD...!

"...WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
AS I CREEPT FORWARD?

"THE SUDDEN THRUST OF A HUN
BAYONET...? SOME SODDIN'
POISON EATIN' INTO MY
BLOOD...?

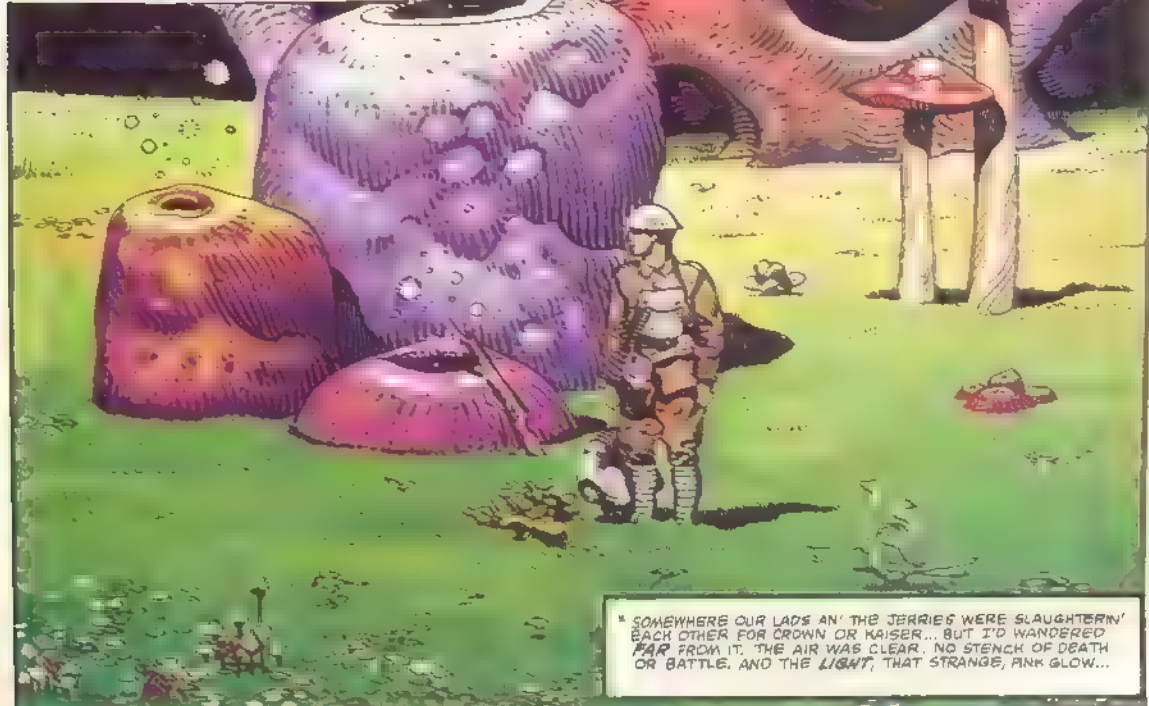


"BUT *NOTHIN'* I THOUGHT
PREPARED ME FOR WHAT
WAS *WAITIN'* WHEN IT
CLEARED.

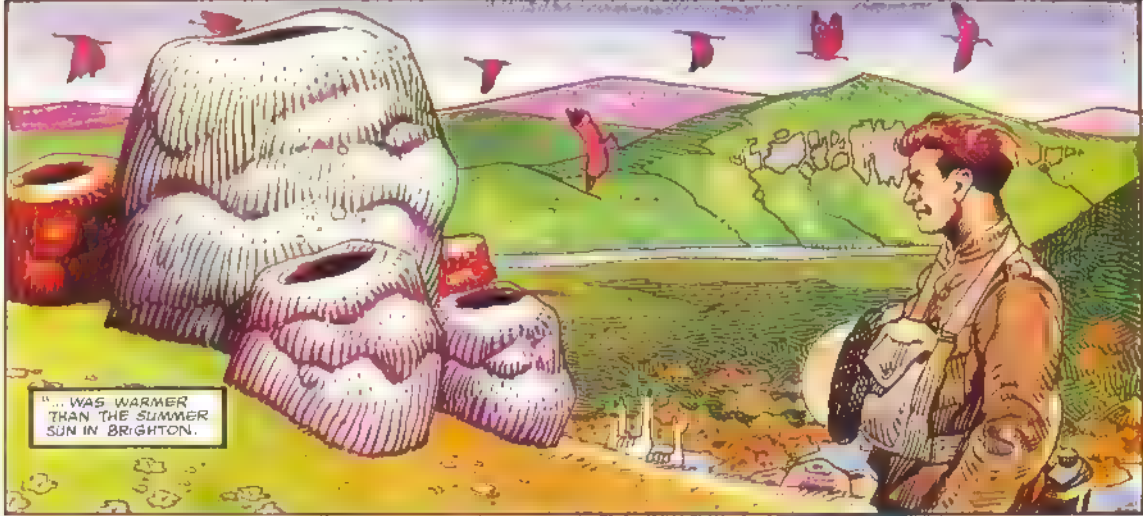
"THERE ARE AWFUL
WAYS TO DIE IN A
WAR. I THOUGHT
OF 'EM ALL MOVIN'
IN THAT SAS.



"I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE IN THE NAME OF
SWEET HARRY I'D *GOTTEN TO*. BUT IT SURELY
HAD WHERE I'D *BEEN BEATEN* EVERY WAY
TO THE VICAR'S DOOR!



* SOMEWHERE OUR LADS AN' THE JERRIES WERE SLAUGHTERIN'
EACH OTHER FOR CROWN OR KAISER... BUT I'D WANDERED
FAR FROM IT. THE AIR WAS CLEAR. NO STENCH OF DEATH
OR BATTLE. AND THE *LIGHT*, THAT STRANGE, PINK GLOW...



"... WAS WARMER
THAN THE SUMMER
SUN IN BRIGHTON.



" I AIN'T A MAN TO
LET HIS MATES
DOWN, BUT AFTER
HELLISH COMBAT...

"... HERE WAS
PARADISE, AN'
SEEN' NO CLEAR
WAY OUT SINCE
THE GAS DISPERSED

"... WHY NOT
PARTAKE OF
WHATEVER
IT OFFERED?



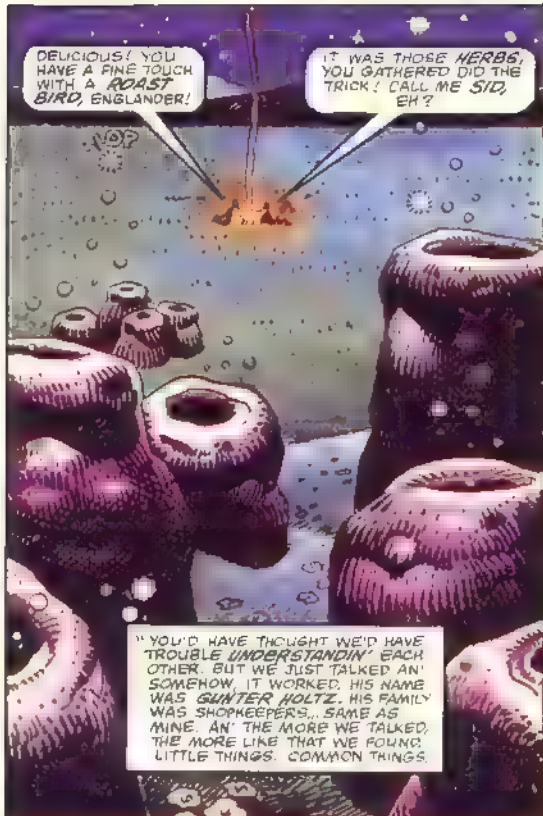
" I WAS HAPPY. AT
PEACE. FEELIN'S
THE WAR HAD ALMOST
WIPE AWAY.



THEN, ABOUT TWILIGHT IT
WAS... I GOT REMINDED
OF THE WAR. SEEMS I
WAS SHARIN' THIS PARADISE
WITH ONE OF THE
KAISER'S OWN.

ONLY INSTEAD OF
TAKIN' MY ENFIELD
AN' HAVIN' A SHOT
AT 'EM... I WAITED.

AND WHEN THE WAR WAS OVER, THE GERMAN...



DELICIOUS! YOU
HAVE A FINE TOUCH
WITH A **ROAST
BIRD**, ENGLAND!

IT WAS THOSE **HERBS**,
YOU GATHERED DID THE
TRICK! CALL ME **SID**,
EH?

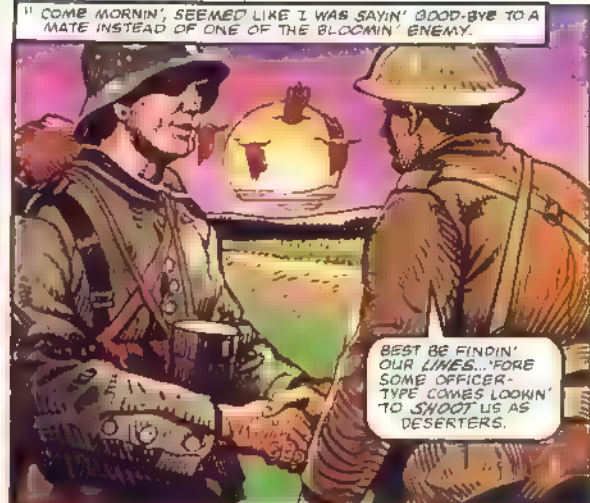
"YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT WE'D HAVE
TROUBLE **UNDERSTANDIN'** EACH
OTHER. BUT WE JUST TALKED AN'
SOMEHOW, IT WORKED. HIS NAME
WAS **GUNTER HOLTZ**. HIS FAMILY
WAS **SHOPKEEPERS**... SAME AS
MINE. AN' THE MORE WE TALKED,
THE MORE LIKE THAT WE FOUND.
LITTLE THINGS. COMMON THINGS.



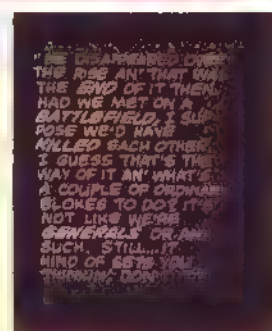
ALUF
WIEDERSEHEN...
SID!

RIGHT
YOU
ARE...
GUNTER!

"COME MORNIN', SEEMED LIKE I WAS SAYIN' **GOOD-BYE** TO A
MATE INSTEAD OF ONE OF THE **BLOOMIN' ENEMY**."



BEST BE FINDIN'
OUR **LINES**... 'FORE
SOME OFFICER-
TYPE COMES LOOKIN'
TO **SHOOT** US AS
DESSERTERS.



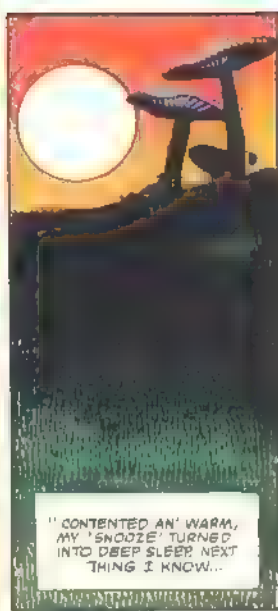
"HE **DISAPPEARED** OVER
THE **ROSE** AN' THAT WAS
THE **END** OF IT THEN.
HAD WE MET ON A
BATTLEFIELD, I SUP-
POSE WE'D HAVE
KILLED EACH OTHER.
I GUESS THAT'S THE
WAY OF IT AN' WHAT'S
A COUPLE OF ORDINARY
BLOKES TO DO? IT'S
NOT LIKE WE'RE
GENERALS OR AN
SUCH. STILL...IT
HIND OF GETS YOU
THINKIN' DON'T IT?



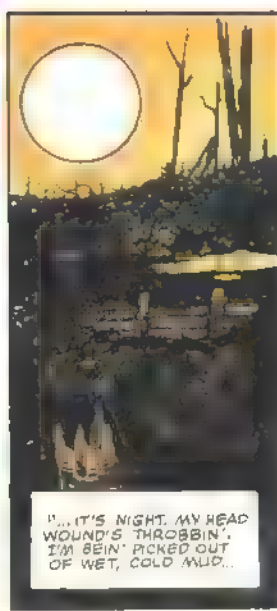
THIS NEW DAY WAS
HOTTER THAN THE LAST.
SO, BEFORE RUSHIN'
BACK TO BATTLE, I
DECIDED TO ENJOY
A BIT OF A SWIM...



NO HARM IN A
SHORT SNOOZE,
EITHER. NO...
HARM... AT...
ALLLLL...



"CONTENTED AN' WARM,
MY 'SNOOZE' TURNED
INTO DEEP SLEEP NEXT
THING I KNOW..."



"...IT'S NIGHT. MY HEAD
WOUND'S THROBBIN',
I'M BEIN' PICKED OUT
OF WET, COLD MUD..."



"AND PARADISE
IS FAR, FAR
BEHIND ME..."



THAT'S SOLEMN TRUTH, DOC.
BUT WILL ANYONE BELIEVE IT?

THEY'LL BELIEVE
THAT BULLET
KNICKED YOUR
BRAIN, SID!
DON'T SPREAD
SUCH RUBBISH.



GOOD
ADVICE,
SIDNEY

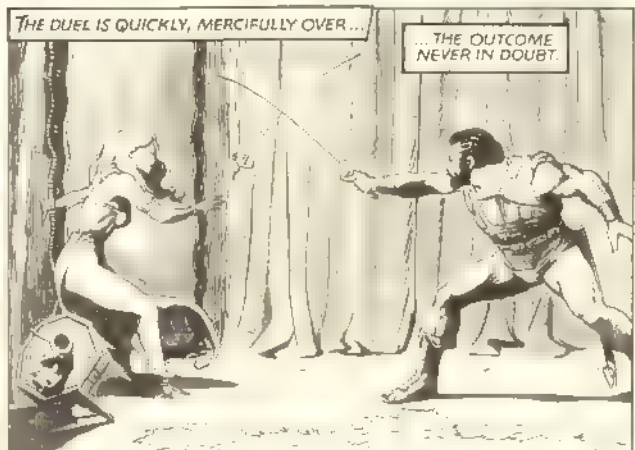
AYE! 'SPECIALLY
SINCE WE CAN'T
FIND ANY EX-
PLANATION
WHY HE'S THAT
FINE SHADE OF
PINK!

No ONE EVER DID. REACTION WAS SOMEBOW DIFFERENT
ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF NO MAN'S LAND, WHOSE ONLY
INTERVIEW WITH ANOTHER GAS ATTACK VICTIM, DR.
GLINTER HOLTS, PROMPTED A MEMORANDUM TO THE
GENERAL STAFF



WE WERE FORTUNATE!
ONLY ONE MAN INFECTED!
IT COULD HAVE BEEN
MANY!

THEN IT'S SETTLED?
THE FORMULA WILL BE
DESTROYED. THE DANGER
OF THIS NEW WEAPON
AFFECTING OUR OWN
TROOPS IS FAR TOO
GREAT!





I CAME
FACE TO
FACE...
WITH MY
TRUE
SELF.

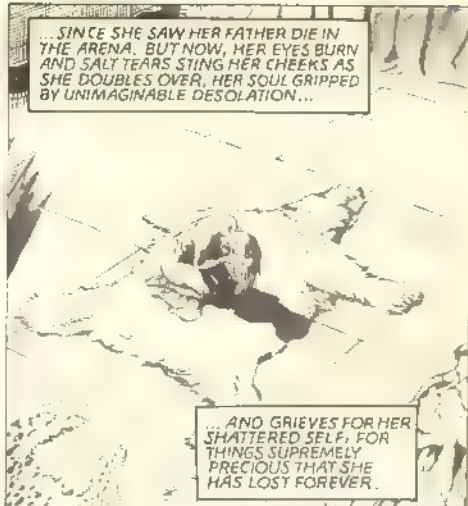
I KNEW YOUR
FATHER. I WAS
PRIVILEGED TO
CALL HIM,
FRIEND, WITH
THOSE WORDS...



... YOU
SHAME HIS
MEMORY...

-- AND YOUR
MOTHER'S
AS WELL!

SHE HAS NOT
CRIED IN
TWENTY YEARS...



... SINCE SHE SAW HER FATHER DIE IN
THE ARENA. BUT NOW, HER EYES BURN
AND SALT TEARS STING HER CHEEKS AS
SHE DOUBLES OVER, HER SOUL GRIPPED
BY UNIMAGINABLE DESOLATION...

... AND GRIEVES FOR HER
SHATTERED SELF, FOR
THINGS SUPREMELY
PRECIOUS THAT SHE
HAS LOST FOREVER.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT, IN FABLED,
FARAWAY DAMASCUS, THE DESERT NIGHT IS
DARK AND STRANGELY CHILL. THE MOON IS
A BLACK SPOT ON THE STAR-SPECKLED SKY
AND THE ENTIRE CITY SEEMS GRIPPED BY AN
UNNATURAL STILLNESS.

AND IF, WHILE MAKING
THEIR APPOINTED ROUNDS,
THE CITY GUARDS HEAR AN
OCCASIONAL SCREAM
FROM A CERTAIN PALACE
THAT FRONTS THE PLAZA
OF THE SACRED WAY...

THE MAN WHO RESIDES WITHIN IS FEARED BY
KING AND COMMONER BOTH -- WITH GOOD REASON.

WHAT A SHAME,
GAIUS MARCELLUS. I
SO EXPECTED YOU TO
FACE TCHUNDA'S
MINISTRATIONS WITH
THE RENOWNED
STOICISM OF WHICH
YOU ROMANS SEEM
SO PROUD. HE HAS
BARELY BEGUN, YET
YOU SHRIEK LIKE A BABE.

YOU WILL
PAY FOR THIS...
WIZARD! I AM...
AN OFFICER
OF ROME!

NO, TRIBUNE,
YOU ARE A THIEF--
WHO STOLE FROM
ME SOMETHING
OF INCOMPAR-
ABLE VALUE.

... THEY PAY IT
NO HEED.



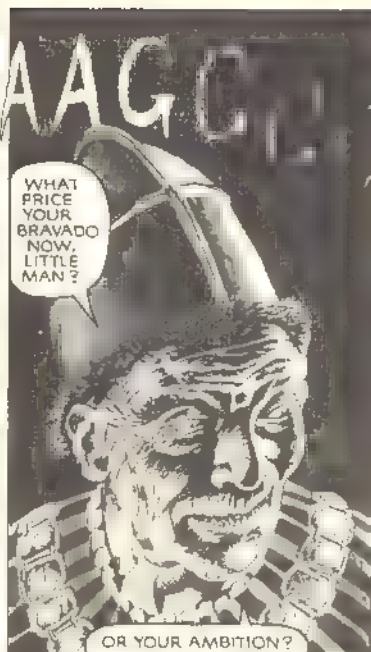
I... RESCUED A DAUGHTER...
OF ROME FROM THE CLUTCHES...
OF A FIEND FROM HELL!



HIS TONGUE
IS INSOLENT,
MASTER. SHALL
I REMOVE IT?

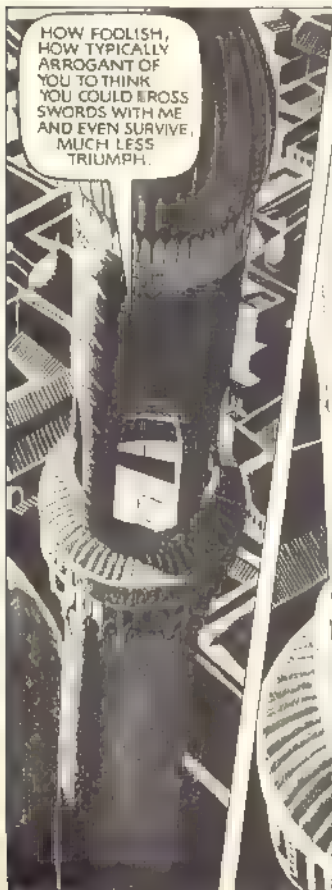


YOU MAY DO
AS YOU SEE FIT,
TCHUNDA. I HAVE
NO FURTHER
NEED OF THE
TRIBUNE.



WHAT
PRICE
YOUR
BRAVADO
NOW,
LITTLE
MAN?

OR YOUR AMBITION?



HOW FOOLISH,
HOW TYPICALLY
ARROGANT OF
YOU TO THINK
YOU COULD CROSS
SWORDS WITH ME
AND EVEN SURVIVE.
MUCH LESS
TRIUMPH.



YOU HOPED TO WIN FAVOR IN
CAESAR'S EYES BY RETURNING HIS
WAYWARD GRAND DAUGHTER TO
HIM. THAT MEANS NOTHING TO ME.

I HAVE SEEN MORE EMPERORS,
MORE EMPIRES, THAN YOU CAN
POSSIBLY IMAGINE, TRIBUNE. YOUR
ROME WILL LIVE ITS ALLOTTED
SPAN AND THEN IT TOO WILL PASS
AWAY -- LIKE EGYPT AND PERSIA
AND BABYLON AND ASSYRIA
BEFORE IT.

THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN US, MY
DEAR FULVA, IS
THAT YOU SERVE
THE DREAMS AND
DESIRES OF MAN.



I, THE DREAMS AND
DESIRES OF GODS.

AND MY GODS
DESIRE
ONE THING:

...THE LIFE AND SOUL OF MARADA STARHAIA, CALLED THE SHE-WOLF!

SHE HAS POWER-- BOTH TEMPORAL AND ARCAINE-- THOUGH SHE KNOWS IT NOT.

I SOUGHT TO BIND THAT POWER TO THE SERVICE OF MY DAMNED MASTERS-- BUT YOU, TRIBUNE, PREVENTED ME.

I TRUST YOU HAVE LEARNED FULL WELL THE PRICE OF YOUR FOLLY.

BUT ALL IS NOT LOST. FAR FROM IT. I HAVE THE BITCH'S CLOTHES, ARMOR, WEAPONS. I HAVE INTIMATE KEEPSAKES BELONGING TO BOTH HER AND HER ACCURSED DAM. FROM THEM, I CAN FASHION THE MEANS OF HER BLESSED DAMNATION.

HARKEN, THOU MINISTERS OF THE OUTER DARK, THOU DEMONS OF THE LOST, THOU SERVANTS OF THE MABDHARA. HEAR ONE WHO CALLS THEE BROTHER--

--AND SUMMONS THEE TO EARTH!

BLACK LIGHTNING EXPLODES FROM THE WIZARD'S HANDS, ELDRITCH ENERGIES COALESCING BEFORE SIMYON KARASHNUR'S EXCITED, HUNGRY EYES INTO A HUMAN AVATAR OF AN OTHER-DIMENSIONAL DEMON.



IS OUR SHAPE
NOT PLEASING TO
THEE, SIMYON?

IT IS
PERFECT!

YOU ARE FORMED OF THE
ESSENCE OF OUR DARK LORDS,
YET YOU RETAIN WITHIN YOU
A PIECE OF THE SOUL -- THE
FUNDAMENTAL "SELF" -- OF THE
SHE-WOLF. YOU ARE BOUND TO
HER AND SHE TO YOU. NO POWER
ON EARTH CAN HIDE HER
FROM YOU.

FIND MARADA, REAVER,
THAT SHE MAY BE DELIVERED
INTO THE HANDS OF THEY
WHOM WE BOTH SERVE, THE
LORDS OF THE ABYSS!



BEFORE THE ECHOES OF MARADA'S SCREAM HAVE DIED AWAY, DONAL, RHIANNON AND OFFICERS OF THE NIGHTWATCH ARE IN HER APARTMENT, WEAPONS DRAWN, READY FOR ACTION, AS THE SORCERESS-QUEEN CASTS A SPELL TO FLOOD THE ROOM WITH LIGHT.



MARADA, WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

I... I...

BRIGHT GODDESS PROTECT ME--IN MY MIND, MY DREAMS, IT WAS MONSTROUS! A THING-- SO STRONG, SO HUNGRY, SO... EVIL!

IT-- WAS ME!



SEARCH THESE ROOMS. THIS ENTIRE WING OF THE KEEP. REPORT ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

THERE, THERE, CHILD. WHATEVER THREATENED YOU IS GONE. YOU ARE QUITE SAFE.

BY MY LADY-- HER BACK!



SOMETHING, MOTHER?

I DO NOT KNOW. TO THE NAKED EYE, HER FLESH IS UNMARKED, YET I SENSE DEEP SCARS--RECENTLY MADE--ACROSS HER BACK.



THE PSYCHIC RESIDUE OF THESE WOUNDS IS UNSPEAKABLY FOUL, DONAL, AS IS THE CREATURE THAT FORMED THEM.

MARADA'S DREAM SUGGESTS THAT HE IS NOT FINISHED WITH HER.



PAPA? GRANDMOTHER? WHAT'S GOING ON?

ARIANHOD! WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP AT THIS UNGODLY HOUR, DAUGHTER?

I HEARD A SCREAM. AND THEN THE WAR-TOCSIN SOUNDED. I WAS CURIOUS. I... WANTED TO HELP.

THAT'S MY BRAVE GIRL.

IT WAS ONLY A FALSE ALARM, ARI. NOTHING TO CONCERN YOURSELF WITH. SO YOU CAN TURN AROUND AND MARCH STRAIGHT BACK TO BED.

WAIT, DONAL. I DO NOT THINK MARADA SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE AND SINCE YOU AND I WILL BE BUSY REVIEWING ASHANDRIAR'S DEFENSES. WHY NOT LET ARI STAY WITH HER?

ALL RIGHT, MOTHER.

GRANDMOTHER LOOKED GRIM. FATHER, TOO. WHATEVER MANIFESTED ITSELF TONIGHT MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY IMPRESSIVE.

IT WAS ONLY A DREAM.

AROUND HERE, WE TAKE DREAMS SERIOUSLY.

I'M ARIANHOD. AND YOU'RE MARADA.

ARE YOU HURT? I'M A HEALER. I COULD TAKE AWAY THE PAIN.

I WISH IT WAS THAT SIMPLE. BUT I THANK YOU FOR THE THOUGHT.

I'VE NEVER SEEN HAIR LIKE YOURS, EVEN AMONG THE NORSEMEN.

I'M TOLD I'M UNIQUE. MY MOTHER ASKED DEIPHOB-- THE SYBELLINE ORACLE AT CUMAE-- ABOUT ME, AND WAS TOLD THAT I WOULD HOLD THE FATE OF THE WORLD IN MY HANDS. MOTHER BELIEVED HER.

SO DID I, FOR A TIME.

THEY TALK THROUGH THE NIGHT, EACH QUICKLY WARMING TO THE OTHER, THE TWO OF THEM RELATING WITH SURPRISING EASE AND NATURALNESS. THEY BEGIN AS TOTAL STRANGERS.

BY MORNING,
THEY ARE
FRIENDS.

I READ THE DIVINE JULIUS'
COMMENTARIES, ON HIS INVASION
OF BRITAIN. HE SPOKE OF
ASHANDRIAR AS A HOME OF THE
GODS, LIKE MOUNT OLYMPUS.

IT'S TRUE THIS IS
A FAERY PLACE--
PART OF THE WORLD,
YET APART FROM
IT-- BUT WE'RE
HUMAN ENOUGH--
TOO HUMAN,
GRANDMOTHER
THINKS.

MY MOTHER DIED WHEN I WAS BORN. FATHER AND GRAND-
MOTHER RAISED ME. THEY'RE TEACHING ME THE SCIENCES
AND THE **GREAT ART**-- MAGIC, YOU'D CALL IT.

BUT PAPA SEES DARK TIMES COMING.
HE FEELS I SHOULD LEARN TO FIGHT--
AS BOTH SOLDIER AND LEADER-- AND
WHO BETTER TO TEACH ME THAN THE
WOMAN WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE
ONE OF THE FINEST WARRIORS
HE'S EVER SEEN.

ARE YOU
REALLY
THAT GOOD,
MARADA?

ONCE. A
LIFETIME AGO.

DID I SAY SOMETHING WRONG?
I'M SORRY, MARADA. I DIDN'T
MEAN TO PRY.

IT'S ALL
RIGHT,
LITTLE
ONE.

ARI, CARE TO
TRY YOUR
LUCK WITH
A BLADE?

THE TARGET'S AN
AWFULLY LONG
WAY OFF, RORY.

JUST RELAX AND THROW, LASS--
AS YOU'VE SEEN US DO.

BONK!

YOU COULD HAVE
DONE WORSE, ARI. AT
LEAST YOU HIT THE
TARGET. NOT BAD
FOR A START.

WOULD YOU
LIKE TO SHOW
ME HOW IT'S DONE,
MARADA?

I...

NO.

THE SHE-WOLF IS DEAD,
ARIANRHOD. THE WOMAN
WARRIOR IS NO MORE. I
WILL NOT HOLD OR USE A
WEAPON, EVER AGAIN.

PLEASE
DO NOT
ASK ME
TO.

OR ASK
ME WHY.

ARI RESPECTS
MARADA'S WISHES
AND DOES NOT
PRESS THE POINT.

OVER THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW, SHE
CONTINUES TO GUIDE HER NEW-FOUND
FRIEND ON A TOUR OF THE GREAT FORTRESS--
THROUGH CHAMBERS OF WOOD AND STONE
AND PUREST CRYSTAL FILLED WITH ARTIFACTS
FROM EVERY PART OF THE WORLD, EVERY
AGE OF MAN'S-- AND, INDEED, THE
EARTH'S-- EXISTENCE.

THE DAYS BECOME WEEKS; THE WEEKS, MONTHS. ACROSS THE FACE
OF BRITAN-- AND EUROPE BEYOND-- IT IS WINTER, YET WITHIN
RHIANNON'S REALM THE TREES ARE GREEN, THE BREEZES SOFT, THE
AIR THICK WITH THE HEADY SCENT OF WILDFLOWERS.

ALMOST AGAINST HER WILL,
MARADA FINDS HERSELF EN-
THRALLED BY THE TIMELESS BEAUTY
OF ASHANDRIAR. SHE AND ARIANRHOD
BECOME INSEPARABLE COMPANIONS
AND, THROUGH THE GIRL, MARADA
DISCOVERS THE MYRIAD, MADCAP
WONDERS OF CHILDHOOD-- AND A
JOYOUS INNOCENCE THAT SHE HAD
BEEN DENIED.

GRADUALLY, THE HARSH LINES FADE FROM HER FACE, THE HAUNTED, HUNTED LOOK
FROM HER EYES. SHE FINDS THOSE EYES TURNING MORE AND MORE TOWARDS
DONAL MacLLYANLLWYR...

... AND DISCOVERS, TO HER SURPRISE,
THAT WHEN HE SMILES, SHE SMILES
BACK. AND WHEN HE REACHES
OUT TO HER ...

...SHE DOES NOT PULL AWAY.

Ooohhhh... THIS FEELS INDECENTLY DELICIOUS. TADGH HAD ME EXERCISE FOR AN HOUR TODAY AND THEN RUN TWO ENTIRE LEAGUES!

I ACHIE.
NO--
I HURT!

WITH THE PAIN COMES STRENGTH. SO THAT, WHEN YOU NEED YOUR BODY, IT WON'T... IT WON'T... BETRAY YOU. FAIL YOU.

YOU SOUND SAD, MARADA. IS SOMETHING WRONG?

NO. JUST... MEMORIES-- THINGS I HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF IN QUITE A WHILE.

YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THIS HOT SPRING, ARI. IT'S LOVELY.

AND I'LL WAGER YOU'D RATHER BE ENJOYING IT WITH SOMEONE BESIDES ME. A VERY SPECIAL SOMEONE.

THAT'S ABSURD. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING AB--

OULFFF!

HAH!

YOU AND FATHER COULDN'T BE MORE OBVIOUS ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS IF YOU TRIED.

IS THAT SO? YOU'RE LUCKY I HAVE SOAP IN MY EYES...

...ELSE I'D MAKE YOU EAT THOSE WORDS.

MARADA!

Hmnh?

WHERE DID YOU GET THOSE TERRIBLE SCARS?!

THERE ARE NO SCARS.

I CAN SEE THEM! YOUR BACK MUST HAVE BEEN LAID OPEN TO THE BONE!

THERE ARE NO SCARS!

DAMN YOU, ARIANRHOD!

MUST YOU PRY INTO EVERYTHING?! MY BODY, MY PAST LIFE-- LIKE MY FEELINGS FOR YOUR FATHER-- ARE PRIVATE THINGS, OF CONCERN TO NO ONE BUT MYSELF!

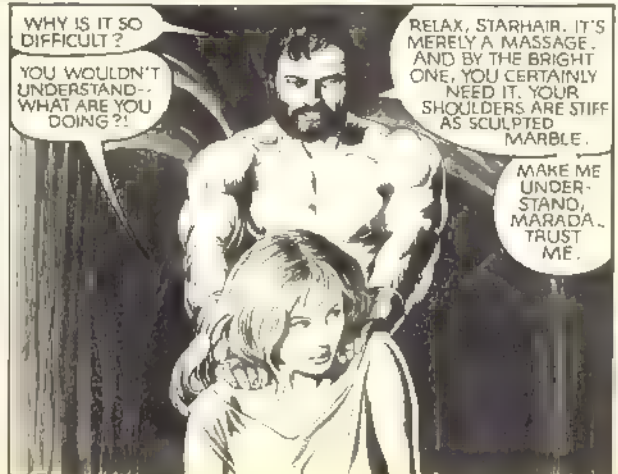
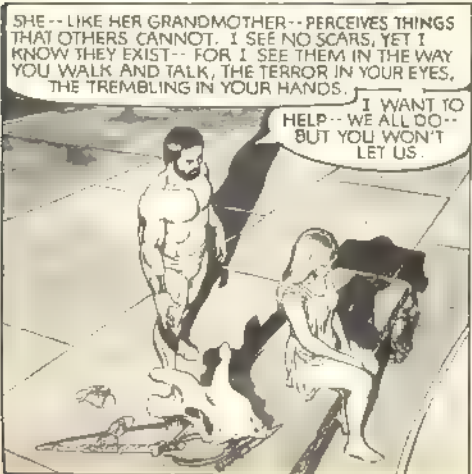
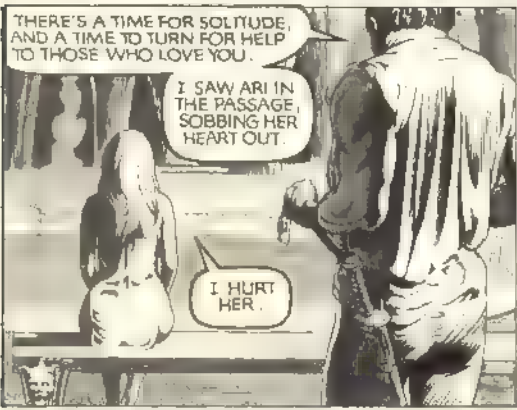
MIND YOUR MANNERS, CHILD, AND LEAVE ME BE!

I'M SORRY, MARADA! I... I DIDN'T MEAN--!

I'M SORRY!



IT'S BEEN ALMOST A YEAR YET I STILL REACT AS IF IT HAPPENED ONLY YESTERDAY. THE WOUNDS ARE SO RAW THAT I LASH OUT EVEN AT THIS CHILD I CARE FOR AS IF SHE WAS MY VERY OWN.



THE FIRST LESSON I EVER LEARNED AS A CHILD WAS TO TRUST NO ONE.

AS YOU WISH.

I AM ROMAN, DONAL. MY HOUSE IS OLD AND NOBLE. EVEN NOW, MY... SHAME CHOKES ME.

YOUR FATHER VALUED COURAGE AS WELL AS PRIDE. TO HIM, NO FOE -- REAL OR IMAGINED -- WAS SO FEARSOME IT COULD NOT BE FACED.

FOR A TIME, THE GROTTO IS SILENT, THEN, HALTINGLY, MARADA BEGINS HER STORY.

* I WAS IN DAMASCUS, HAVING LED A CARAVAN THE LENGTH OF THE SILK ROAD. I, AND THE WARRIORS OF MY ESCORT, HAD COMMANDEERED A TAVERN.

"WE WERE CELEBRATING OUR SAFE RETURN WITH A VENGEANCE."

MY ALE!

"I REMEMBER," DONAL SAYS SOFTLY. "I WAS STANDING HOODED IN THE SHADOWS, AWAITING AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO YOU."

YOUR PARDON, DECURION. INNKEEPER, ANOTHER FLAGON FOR OUR BRAVE LEGIONARY?

MY THANKS, FRIEND. THIS DANCING MAKES ONE AS PARCHED AS A WEEK ON THE DESERT.

"I DRAINED THE MUG, TO THE CHEERS OF THE CROWD. TOO LATE, I REALISED...

"... THAT THE WINE HAD BEEN DRUGGED.

WHOA, SHE-WOLF! HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK?

FEAR NOT. I'LL SEE YOU GET HOME UNMOLESTED.

SHE-WOLF, A FLAGON FOR YOU!

I AWOKE IN A TOWER, CHAINED
WITHIN A MYSTIC CIRCLE.

WHO
RULES
THIS
PLACE?!
WHY
AM I
HERE?!

GREETINGS,
MARADA. I
AM **SIMYON
KARASHNUR**.

THE SORCERER!
YOU'VE
HEARD
OF ME?

ENOUGH TO
KNOW THAT
YOUR NAME'S
A CURSE FROM
HERE TO THE
MILE CATARACTS.
YOU'RE SAID TO
BE IMMORTAL,
AND TO TRAFFIC
WITH DEMONS.

BOTH ACCUSATIONS ARE TRUE,
SHE-WOLF. MY REPUTATION IS
AS WELL-DESERVED
AS YOUR OWN.

IN EXCHANGE FOR HUMAN LIVES,
HUMAN SOULS, MY MASTERS--THE
MADDHARA, THE DREAD LORDS OF
THE ABYSS--GRANT ME POWER.

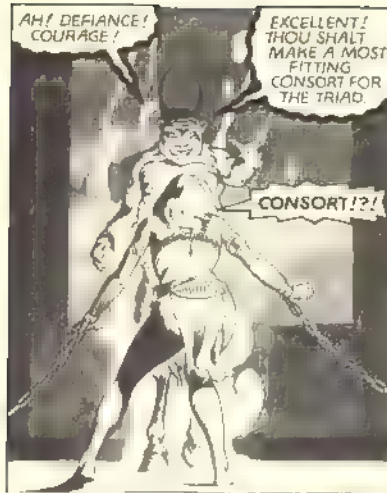
AM I THEN TO BE
SACRIFICED?
BUTCHER?

OF COURSE-- BUT
NOT QUITE THE WAY
YOU THINK. YOU ARE
A MOST **SPECIAL**
YOUNG WOMAN,
MARADA... FOR
WHOM MY MASTERS
INTEND AN
EQUALLY SPECIAL
FATE.

BEHOLD--
YGARON!

THOU ART
MARADA? THOU
ART PLEASING TO
THE EYE. THAT
IS GOOD.

HIS VOICE WAS DEEP,
BUT THE IMPLACABLE
CRUELTY IN HIS EYES
AND SMILE BELIED ITS
SOFT TONES. HIS
PRESENCE MADE ME
GAG, AND FILLED
KARASHNUR'S TOWER
WITH THE STENCH OF
THE CHARNAL PIT. I
KNEW THERE WAS
NO HOPE, BUT I
DETERMINED TO MEET
MY END BRAVELY,
WITH HONOR.



AH! DEFIANCE!
COURAGE!

EXCELLENT!
THOU SHALT
MAKE A MOST
FITTING
CONSORT FOR
THE TRIAD.

CONSORT!?!



AYE!

DIDST THOU THINK ONE
OF THE MABDHARA
WOULD SET FOOT ON
YOUR PATHETIC WORLD
MERELY TO TAKE A
HUMAN LIFE?

UNNNNGH!



"I FOUGHT, DONAL,
AS HARD AND
FIERCELY AS I KNEW
HOW, WITH ALL MY
STRENGTH AND SKILL

"TO NO AVAIL



"MY RESISTANCE
PLEASED THE
DEMON LORD.
HE DELIGHTED
IN SHOWING ME.

"...HOW
INEFFECTUAL
IT WAS.



"HOW HELPLESS I WAS.

"IN HIS PASSION, THE MONSTER'S CLAWS RAKED MY BACK, CUTTING ME TO THE BONE. I THOUGHT, I PRAYED, I FEARED, THE WOUNDS WERE FATAL.

"BUT WITH A CONTEMPTUOUS WAVE OF HIS HAND, YGARON HEALED ME.

"YGARON TOOK PART OF MY SOUL AND REPLACED IT WITH A PIECE OF HIS-- SO THAT, WHEN THAT ENDLESS NIGHT FINALLY CAME TO AN' END AND HE RETURNED TO HIS MAGGOT-RIDDEN REALM, I ... BEGGED HIM TO STAY.

AGENTS OF THE TRIBUNE GAIUS MARCELLUS FULVA FREED ME FROM KARASHNUR'S PALACE. FULVA MEANT TO SEND ME TO ROME. THE REST YOU KNOW.

YOU UNDERWENT A TERRIBLE ORDEAL, MARADA. BUT YOU SURVIVED.

MY BODY SURVIVED.

SINCE CHILDHOOD, I'VE PRIDED MYSELF--AND... DEPENDED--ON MY ABILITY TO DEFEND MYSELF AGAINST ANY FOE, SURMOUNT ANY OBSTACLE. BUT YGARON TOOK ME AGAINST MY WILL, AND THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO.

BETTER I'D BEEN A MEEK, MILD, COMPLIANT WENCH--WHO ACCEPTS SUCH VIOLATIONS AS A FACT OF LIFE--THAN TO HAVE DREAMED OF BEING SOMETHING BETTER...

...ONLY TO SEE THAT DREAM SHATTERED.

YOU'RE TOO HARD ON YOURSELF. NO WARRIOR ■ INVINCIBLE. WE ALL HAVE FOES WHOM WE CANNOT DEFEAT.

AND AFTER SUCH A DEFEAT, DONAL, ■ YOUR SOUL TWISTED INSIDE-OUT?

AND ARE YOU SO TERRIFIED OF IT HAPPENING AGAIN THAT YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON WHAT YOU ARE?!

WHAT AM I, DONAL? WARRIOR? WOMAN? BOTH? PERHAPS IT WAS FOOLISH OF ME TO THINK MY SKILL AT ARMS MADE ME SAFE, INVIOLENT. I DON'T KNOW.

AT LEAST NOW I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS.



"FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, IT HAS BEEN MY GREATEST WISH--"

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"--TO ESCAPE FROM THE COLD METAL PERFECTION OF THIS BODY, TO LEAVE BEHIND ME THE LIFE OF A ROBOT AND BECOME A HUMAN BEING."

HEART AND STEEL

I KNOW OF
A WOMAN...

...WHO
HAS
BEEN
SLEEPING
FOR A
VERY
LONG
TIME."

HEARING NOTHING,
SEEING NOTHING,
SHE IS CUT OFF
FROM THE WORLD
AROUND HER."

SHE LIVES WITHIN
HERSELF, WITHIN
HER MIND. SHE IS
DREAMING.

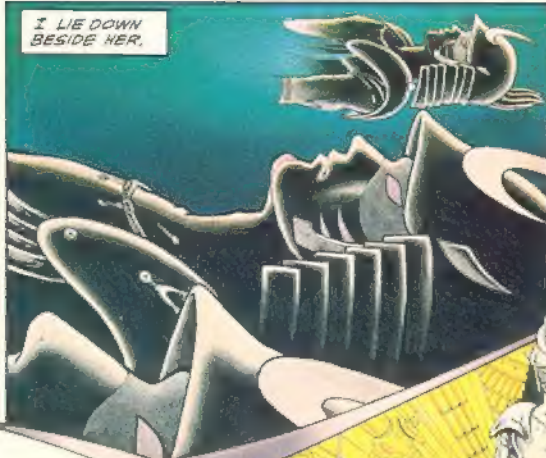
HOW I ENVY HER...

...FOR DREAMS ARE MEANT...

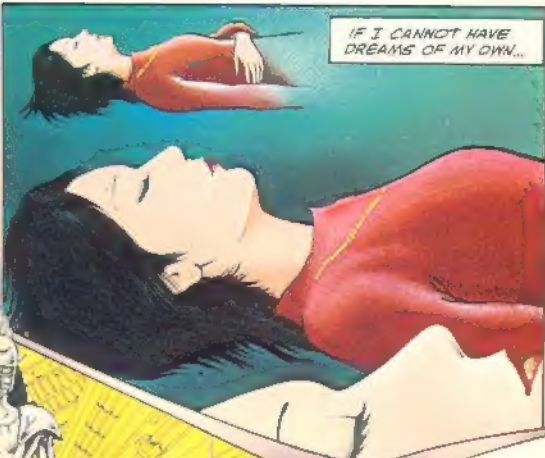
FOR THOSE OF FLESH AND BLOOD...

...AND NOT FOR THOSE OF STEEL.

I LIE DOWN
BESIDE HER.



IF I CANNOT HAVE
DREAMS OF MY OWN...



... PERHAPS
I CAN SHARE
HERS, AND
SO BECOME
HUMAN.



WALKING THE
CORRIDORS OF
MY OWN MIND, I
WAIT AND HOPE.
WILL THE IMAGES
COME, AND PICTURES
FORM FOR ME?"

ALL AT ONCE, SOMETHING DOES TAKE SHAPE--



-- A DREAM MACHINE.

IT IS NOT WHAT
I WANTED. I
FLEE THROUGH
THE UNENDING
METAL AND
MACHINERY TRYING
TO FIND A WAY OUT
OF THIS TECHNO-
LOGICAL NIGHTMARE...



... BUT EACH PATH-
WAY EACH DOOR
THAT I OPEN
HOPING TO FIND
THE SECRET OF
HUMANITY, DRAWS
ME INTO HER
DREAM...



... AND THEN SENDS ME PLUNGING BACK AGAIN.





AND I ASK MYSELF WHY I CANNOT ESCAPE MY CONNECTION
WITH THIS HUMAN BEING, WHY MY DREAMS ARE DOMINATED
AND OVERRUN BY THINGS OF METAL, OR WHY I, A THING
OF METAL MYSELF SHOULD HAVE EVER WISHED FOR
HUMANITY.

THE IMAGES BROUGHT FORTH BY MY DREAM
OVERWHELM ME, AND I CANNOT CONTAIN THEM!

I NO LONGER KNOW WHETHER I AM A
ROBOT WHO WISHES TO BECOME HUMAN...



...OR A WOMAN WHO IS
DREAMING SHE IS A
ROBOT."

